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The Little Mother Who Sits At Home

Edited By The Countess Baroçinska

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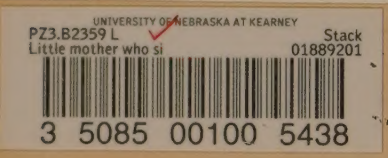

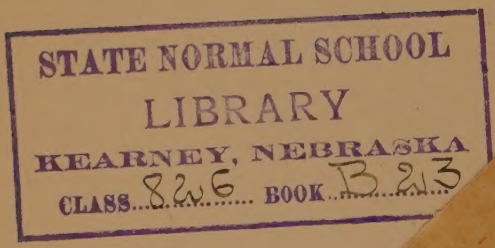

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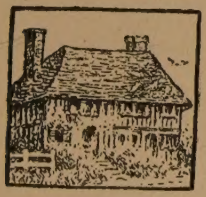
WITHDRAWN

The Little Mother

The Little Mother Who Sits At Home

Edited By The
Countess Barcyńska

With Colored Frontispiece by
Mary La Fetra Russell



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

IT is only fair to admit that the task of editing this little book has been something of a sinecure. Such as it was, it mainly involved the omission of a few passages of purely private interest and a certain amount of repetition—the emphasized injunctions of a loving and anxious mother. The little contribution, in the way of foreword, by the writer's son, gives all the reason necessary for publication. Further editorial comment would, I feel, be redundant.

HÉLÈNE BARCYŃSKA.

Foreword

THESE letters were written by my beloved Mother between my fifth and twenty-fifth birthdays. As they were all dated I am able to arrange the unposted ones, not meant for my youthful eyes, in chronological order with those received by me as child, boy, and man, though many of the latter, I regret to say, were inadvertently destroyed.

I make no apology for their publication. Their anonymity protects the identity of the writer, which is all she would have stipulated. As a revelation of affection as rare as it is pure they will hardly fail to appeal to those of the reading public who can appreciate the wonder of the mother-love.

But to those trained beings of captious taste whose occupation it is to read a book in cold blood, to praise or blame in cold print, I would respectfully point out that they criticise not the living but the dead.

HER SON.

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The Little Mother Who Sits at Home

The Little Mother Who Sits at Home

On Sleeping Alone

(*Unposted*)

BABY-MAN dear:

I do not know whether you will ever see this letter. I can foresee no circumstances in which I could show it to you, certainly not until you are a grown man and have slept with a wife in the crook of your arm. All the same I must write it because I am very very lonely tonight, my son, although you are no farther away from me than the next room where you are lying fast asleep.

You see, it is the first night you have slept alone. My own big bed is empty,

and I am dreading getting into it. That is why I am sitting up so late.

Every night for the past five years I have undressed by the glimmer of the night-light and crept furtively between the sheets so as not to disturb my pink-pyjamed baby lying right across the bed. Then when I've made quite sure I haven't disturbed you I have edged my hand towards you and taken your chubby little fist in mine, and lain listening to your soft and even breathing for blissful hour upon hour, speculating the while about your future until I, too, have fallen asleep at last.

Sweetheart, you mean so very extra much to me, and that is why tonight is such a specially sad night for me. It marks a new kind of loneliness. I have a dear little boy now, but not a baby.

Son, when your father died with such dreadful suddenness you were just four months old. You did not fill my life

then. I was wrapped up in my Beloved. I only thought of you as a dear little human toy we were rather clever to have made. That first night in the desolation of my loss I actually did not remember I had a baby. I had lost my husband. I think my heart broke and ever since I seem merely to have held the pieces together in order to go on living for your sake. For me there was no tender God to touch my misery with healing hands. My God had died too.

Someone insisted on my going to bed at last. Someone undressed me I think and brushed my hair and smoothed my pillow. But when the door was shut on me I sat up, suddenly realizing how awfully funny it was to be left alone in the world. And I laughed and laughed. I heard the house ringing with my laughter and it made me laugh the more. Someone came into the room again, carrying a little bundle in her arms. The

cackle died in my throat. Had *I* been laughing? I held out my arms, and you were put into them.

I sat holding you for hours.

Then I knew that I had someone to live for, after all, the nearest, dearest thing next to your father—your father's own child. So I went to sleep, holding you to me, and ever since, until tonight . . . So you understand, or you will one day, why I am lonely now.

I shall soon get used to it, and probably sleep much better because I have the bed to myself. There is always a commonplace side to these things. You are a greedy little person asleep. Certainly you monopolized more than your fair share of space. On cold nights I was often distinctly chilly because you had a way of gradually rolling yourself into a ball like a hedgehog, with all the clothes round you. Still, I didn't mind being cold. You made up for it

in the mornings when you snuggled so close, so close.

In after years you will wonder how our separation came about. Well, it came with your first suit made by a man-tailor. Before today you always wore an overall and little short knickers. Today, you have discarded overalls and baby garments for a boy's flannel suit. That made you realize you were five and getting sixish. You had been surveying yourself for a little while when you turned to me and said thoughtfully:

"Mummy, men wear trousers like these, don't they?"

"Yes, darling."

"Am I a man?"

"A little man."

You pondered this. "If I'm a little man can't I have a little bedroom all to myself?"

Then I guessed the time had come. But I had to make sure of it. Really,

you are awfully afraid of the dark, my son!

"Little men who sleep alone have to do without night-lights. They're not afraid of the dark," I said.

"I don't want a night-light. If I'm frightened I can come into your bed, can't I?"

I didn't argue after that, dear. I made the change. My dressing-room is now a boy's bedroom, and my boy sleeps there.

Of course the soft motherly part of me hoped that you *might* feel the least little bit afraid, and come creeping back to my arms. But you are so proud of having a room to yourself that the dark must have lost its terrors. You went to bed at seven. I heard your prayers, tucked you up, and kissed you. It's past twelve now. You must have been asleep a long time. I *must* have a peep at you. I shall take this in with me and go on

writing. I haven't the nerve to go to bed. I don't want to cry myself to sleep.

There! the candle is shaded from your eyes and I shan't disturb you. You are all rosy in your sleep. Your hair is rumpled and standing up on end. Oh! why can't I keep you my baby always?

Son of mine, I have been looking at you for a long time, hours, I think, learning your little, little face by heart. I think I know why mothers are so tender to their grown-up sons. In the man grown they see the baby that used to be. They come back—these motherly memories—at a chance touch of a hand, a look in the eyes, in the giving of confidence. You need us, dear, even when you are men; until *She* comes, she who is to mean even more to you than the mother who bore you, because she is to be the mother of your sons.

Darling, you are still a baby in spite

of your little trousers and your room to yourself. What are you going to be in the years to come? God grant you may grow like your father! How you have worshipped him, baby! How often I talk of him to you, so that the image of him in your mind may be a real thing, and grow as you grow.

What are you going to be later on? What am I going to be to you? I'm not so old—twenty-five. Am I old enough, wise enough, to stand to you for mother, father, and big pal? It's easy enough to be a mother; it's easy enough to be a pal. But a father?

Oh, my husband, if you were only here!

Baby-man dear, I have just been saying my prayer on my knees by your side. I have said it every night of my life since you and I were left, and you shall know what it is. Were you a man I don't think you would smile at it. I hope not. It is only this:

"Kind God of the fatherless and the widowed, bless and take care of my little son. Give him a happy, healthy childhood and boyhood, and make him grow into a good man. Amen."

That's all I ask, darling, but it's everything.

The sky is growing grey. The creepy shadows that take bogey-shapes have stolen back into the walls until night-time comes again. The candle has burnt itself out.

Dawn! I must go back to my own room. In an hour or two you'll be awake and running in:

"How did you sleep, mummy?"

"Beautifully, darling!"

You'll forgive me for a fib like that in years and years to come, won't you? I shall have to tell you heaps of them, you know.

On Marrying Again

(*Unposted*)

INSUBORDINATE Child!

I have had to pretend severe displeasure and send you to bed while the birds are still singing and the bees are yet busy in the garden.

And you have marched off like a man, with a stiff upper lip and very bright eyes. There were such a lot of things you wanted to do. I hated sending you upstairs. You wanted to water your garden, and of course it will never occur to you that I have done it for you. I couldn't let my boy's flowers go to bed parched with thirst just because he went to bed naughty! You wanted me to bowl to you. You wanted a slice of the jam-tart cook made this morning for

your supper. All these things you have had to forego. If you cry under the bedclothes I shan't know it, unless . . .

I have been eavesdropping outside your door. You are neither sobbing nor asleep. You are practising in a muted key on the flute Captain —— gave you. And Jane has just come out of your room with a guilty look and a plate. It is quite empty, but it shows a jammy smear. I haven't reprimanded her. I wanted you to have that tart, and so long as *I* have not been weak enough to give it to you, you may still have a wholesome dread of my authority when it has to be exercised. So a fig for your mother and her punishment. You don't very much care. Oh, Boy! You are no longer my baby!

Three times this afternoon I had to stop you from speaking to the —— boys,

and not only speaking but inviting them over into your own domain. It isn't because they are common and vulgar that I object to them. They are undesirable little rips. Captain —— told me so. But you, when I had to be angry with you for disobeying, answered me back. And you selected a stinging little whip of words:

"But why shouldn't I?"

"Because they're not nice boys for you to know."

"How do you know? *You're only a woman!*"

That is your first conscious questioning of my right to be your superior officer, and it raises a very vexed question. Ought I to marry again? For *your* sake, Son.

You see, now, while I'm still rather nice to look at, I have the chance. "He" is very partial to you and thinks you "a jolly little beggar," though get-

ting a bit out of hand, and that you need a man over you.

Did you voice that need today? I think so.

Now let me put it all down in black and white: it helps me to think.

If I marry this particular man I am assured you like him to start with. He is a pal of yours. On the other hand, although I am still a young woman I could not give him all that a young woman should give her husband. I cannot heal my heart as so many women do by again making myself the property of a man. I was your father's. I am jealous of myself because of that. All the living, loving part of me that brought you into being, is buried with him. I guard the sacred, passionate memory of our last embrace. But those are my personal feelings. I must put you first. You are his child.

If I marry, your future would be

assured without any pinching or contriving on my part. You would be a rich man's step-son. If I don't marry, I have got to part with you, to put you amongst men, little men of your own age, and big men to control you.

Women are not generally successful in training boys or dogs. We can't help pampering the pet, with the result that our pet is a pest to other people.

So it comes to this: I shrink from the thought of marriage, and I can't bear the idea of sending you away. How am I to reconcile these opposite inclinations?

I shall have to ask you.

I have asked you.

I put it in the most delicate, tentative, round-about fashion; but you in deepest innocence went plumb-bang to the heart of things.

"Darling," I said, "which would you rather do, go and live with a lot of little boys in a school and learn lessons and

play games, or have the very nicest man you know to come and live with you?"

We both thought of the same person: the name was unnecessary. You asked:

"Would he be with us all day?"

"All day."

"Jolly! Where would he sleep?"

I grew hot and cold—and dumb.

"I shouldn't want him at night," you said, "would you? I'd rather be with boys. How soon can I go, mum?"

"I've got to find the school first, darling."

Already my mind is full of prospectuses, and matrons, and drains. Will they always air your linen? Will they see that you put your sweater on when you come in hot from games? Will they care very much whether you are well or ill?

No; they will be normally constituted, healthy-minded people in charge of a lot of quite ordinary small boys

wonderful only to their little mothers who sit at home. They will take just ordinary sensible care of you because it is to their interest to do so.

It is therefore quite settled. I am not going to marry again.

Oh, dear, dead husband of mine, where are you? How can I live without you through the long years that stretch away before me? Sometimes my spirit faints. Life seems so long! Never in this world to hear your voice again, never to feel the touch of your hand!

Now I must write for those prospectuses.

Preparatory for Harrow or Winchester, I think.

On Sacrifice and Education

(*Unposted*)

MY growing Son:

I have found your school. I think I have inspected almost every preparatory school in the country before I could bring myself to decide definitely. But when I came upon this one I knew I should choose it. It is just what I have had in my mind, and never thought to find. It is a long, low, rambling old-fashioned country house, sensibly modernized (but not spoilt), set in playing fields that surround its own private gardens. Inside, darling, it is just what a little boy who leaves home for the first time should go to. Not a barrack, built only for giving lessons in, but a home. I saw the play-rooms, the

big dormitories, the bedrooms. They have an awfully jolly plan: after you've been there two terms, and provided you've behaved well, you're promoted to a bedroom which you share with one or two pals. In it you have your own private belongings. You are allowed a reasonable time for talking after going to bed, and one of you is made responsible for keeping order and the putting out of the light. If you fail in either of these duties you get a bad mark, and seven bad marks send you back to the dormitory! I think it's a good plan. It teaches you to be trustworthy; and it also means that the new boys have the dormitories to themselves. It will be a relief to me to think that on your first night you will be with your own sort, lonely little boys separated from their mothers for the first time and longing to have a quiet howl under the bedclothes. When your sec-

ond term begins, the sense of loneliness will be forgotten. You will all be in good spirits, interested in each other's holiday experiences, but ready for another three months of work and play.

Then, think of it, my son! there's a clubroom! It has proper padded leather chairs, a great leather sofa, a small billiard table, round tables for games, and a table devoted to papers. On it I saw daily papers, *Punch*, *The Field*, *The Badminton*, *Country Life*, *The United Service Magazine*. In this room you're supposed to observe club conventions, not to disturb others, to keep tolerably quiet, to behave in short like men. There are heaps more things that you'll love, the swimming bath (real sea water) racket courts, games' room, the theatre. This particular school seems to me to cover the whole territory of a boy's desires and requirements as far as a school can.

The headmaster is a dear, with a deep knowledge of boys. He doesn't regard you first and foremost as a young animal to be licked into shape. You'll get your share of lickings, I daresay, but he recognizes that there are other ways of shaping you. He has a nice wife, too, a domesticated, motherly woman. They have no children of their own, and I rather think they have got to regard their boys as their own large family.

I am bubbling with joy inside at having found such a model of a school for you. Selection in this matter is so vital. The preparatory school should, I think, be chosen with even more care than the public school. The preparatory school moulds you. The public school sets that mould; and the subsequent university career is what the sculptor's finishing touches are to the statue he has been at work on. I want

you to have the pick of the first two, so that the third may make you that best of all beings, an English gentleman. I do not mean that you could not be a gentleman without educational advantages. You are, thank God, a gentleman by birth, and even if you were not, you could easily be a gentleman by nature. But just as it is my ambition that you should have the benefit of the three gradational stages, so it is my prayer that you may profit by them all. I want my son to be a gentleman by birth, by nature, and by education. That is almost perfection, dearest.

I take the subject of your education very seriously. Before you were born, your father used to discuss it with me, assuming that you would be a boy. There must have been a purpose in that, since I was to be robbed of him so soon. Your father was a literary man, a student. His name is known only to the

few. All his life he was handicapped by the disadvantage of not being a university man. He told me that if ever we had a son he would stint himself to the uttermost to give him that advantage. He showed me the necessity of it.

It comes to this: public-school and university men belong as it were to a select clan. Even those who were "up" in different years are united by the bond of common associations. If you are a member of this fraternity, later when you enter a profession you find yourself among men of your own set and your own mental attitude, if not of your own college. You have friends or potential friends all around you. The earning of your living becomes a pleasant occupation, not a hard struggle for existence, as the lower middle classes know it. In all the better walks of life, the man with the university training, and especially one with a good degree, is

given preference. Ways are opened for him; berths await him. And this is as it should be. He is the hall-marked article.

There are plenty of men who succeed in life without social and educational advantages. But though they pride themselves on possessing heroic qualities—application, hard work, economy, determination—the truth is that to attain success they have had to live unlovely lives and follow questionable courses. They may have sweated themselves; they certainly have "sweated" others. They have been hard, ignoble, often dishonest "without the law." Such men usually scorn the varsity graduate; often enough they hate a gentleman. But it is a cheap kind of scorn, and the hatred is really envy. How much better is the culture of the gentleman who keeps his hands and his honour clean.

But it is going to cost an awful lot of money, beloved, and I haven't got your father or anyone to help me. You are going to absorb all your mother's funds for years and years to come. You'll be rich at school, but poor in the holidays. We can't have it both ways, darling. *I* don't a bit mind being poor, so long as you are never ashamed of my poverty. You won't when you're older. But boys can be such dreadful snobs!

I can't explain the difficulty to you now. At your age you wouldn't understand the want of money any more than you would understand this letter, were you to see it. Later on, if I am not here, if I have to go before I am able to finish what I have begun, these stray letters, which I write from time to time to ease my loneliness and my aching heart, will show you what I wanted my boy to be, and perhaps help him on his way.

Once upon a time when I was nine-

teen and first married I tried hard to economize in my housekeeping. I was very young and silly in those days. I made a list of the things I would save on, and the other day I came across them pasted in an old diary of your father's. Don't laugh, Son. It will at least show you that your mother was really young once.

1. Three courses instead of five for dinner.
2. Give up scent and ribbons for threading through.
3. Only wear silk stockings in London.
4. Grow vegetables and keep fowls.
5. Ask cook to show me how things are made before I give her notice and get a cheaper one.
6. Buy a money-box and save farthings from the drapers.
7. Get Welsh mutton instead of New Zealand lamb. It ought

to be cheaper, Wales being miles nearer than the other place.

8. Ask the grocer to write English so that I can dispute the items in his book.

My economies will have to be very different now: no play about them, darling. First and foremost I shall have to leave this house where you and your father before you were born, and go into a little semi-detached villa. I have three hundred a year and this house. I have to keep two gardeners, two maid-servants, and a little boy. The little boy is now going to swallow it all. The fees for your preparatory school are £150, so when your clothes have been bought—you grow so fast, dear—that will leave me very little more than a hundred for myself. I shall manage on it, you'll see. Perhaps

I shall be able to think of some way of making a bit more so as to give you a nice time in the holidays.

I am sitting in the garden, with my writing block on my knee. You came up just now, tired for the moment of digging in your garden, and clambered on my lap. You placed a muddy finger-tip between my eyebrows:

"That's the little line that comes when you're asleep in the morning, mummy. I've smoothed it out ever so often, but it comes back again most immediately soon. Why does it come?"

"Worry, darling."

"What do you worry for?"

"I was thinking about money."

"We've got lots of money—oceans!" you protested stoutly.

Then the tide is out, darling!

You sat thinking. Presently you scampered off into the house. You came

back breathless and threw something that chinked into my lap.

"There you are, mummy. I don't want it!"

Your red pillar-box savings bank!

You duck!

My eyes went blind for a minute. When I had suitably thanked you and pretended to have accepted your two hundred pence, you went back to your digging. My dim eyes stared stupidly at the old house facing me, subconsciously making an inventory of home and garden.

Its windows are like eyes. Through the feathery branches of the cedar on the lawn they seem to give me gaze for gaze reproachfully. It is as though they want to remind me of what we are about to lose. From their weather-beaten stone architraves set in old red brick they look down on green turf velvety with the care of two centuries,

on the flagged paths and the clipped yews and the wealth of bloom that abounds in the garden on this summer afternoon. They look down on the sturdy little fair-haired boy in his faded blue garden overall—Son of the house!

Dear God. It hurts!

On the Last Days

(Unposted)

THESE last days, Son! How they drag! I know we both heartily wish they were over. We try to fill them with exciting doings, and our spirits are quite hectically high, aren't they? But our throats hurt and our eyes burn, and we can't bear to look at one another for very long. We're hiding it from each other that the coming parting is going to be an awful trial. It's like waiting in the dentist's room, knowing and fearing the coming cruel wrench. We shall be better when it's over, but not immediately. The wrench makes the void ache almost as much as the tooth did. But the gaping place heals, and in the case of youth, another

tooth fills the void before long. You would understand that simile out of your own experience, would you not?

All the same, in spite of the stomach-achy feelings in our hearts, we've had grand times these last few days, and Captain —— has been a "ripping good sort," hasn't he? He got up all the picnics, and motor-car drives, and cricket-matches for your sake, Son.

He is the man who wants to look after us both, and although we've decided to be independent and look after ourselves it's nice to know we've got such a staunch friend behind us.

So, as I've been on the jaunt with you all day, I've had to do the greater part of your packing at night. That is just as well. You haven't seen it going on. It's done now, all except the labels. In your playbox are your favourite toys: clock-work trains, signals, soldiers, boats, all go with you, my son; but

poor old Teddy Bear, friend of childhood, must be left at home. Teddy Bear's day is over. Eight-year-old boys can't take such things to school. Ten- and eleven-year-old's would laugh at you. Besides, you elected to leave him behind yourself, and I really don't think you care tuppence ha'penny about the long-suffering object. The whacks and bangs he's had! The thumpings and bumpings!

Your tuck-box is also ready. It ought to make you *persona grata* with the other boys, for it's a tuck-box in a thousand. You don't know anything about the goodies inside it, so it will be quite exciting for you to unpack it.

And all your clothes are folded and packed—packed so lovingly, my darling, six pairs of this, six pairs of that, six of these, and six of those. And salt tears have dropped in among them. Lavender would have done better. I

wonder if the servants and matrons who unpack the boys' boxes have the imagination to guess at the love, the kisses, and the tears that are all mixed in with the little shirts, pants, and vests? They're not mothers, poor things, so perhaps they haven't. It was depressing to think that everything I had so lovingly sorted and arranged and prayed over will be unpacked by strangers whose sole interest in them will be to see that each article is marked with the owner's name in full. Strangers! Strangers in future to do everything for my son. I suppose every mother in the world who has to send her son to school for the first time goes through what I am suffering now.

But when he comes back! The joy of turning out the dear, worn garments! The new socks will be all darns—bumpy darns, I'm sure, because darning is a work of the heart as much as the hand;

the once spotless flannels shrunk and discoloured; the Norfolk suits gone thin at the elbows and knees; the shoes worn down at heel—a larger size next term! And yet, Sonnie, how I shall revel in that unpacking! I shall sing over it, hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

But alas! it's a long way from that yet. You've got to leave me first before I can begin to anticipate your coming back.

I saw you looking at me very often and very hard today to see whether I was near to tears. But these are the days when I have to be your backer and bottle-holder and chief of the staff all in one as well as your mother, and I'm keeping a stiff upper lip. I knew that a tremble in my voice, a tear in my eye, would bring you sobbing into my arms, just a very litle boy afraid of facing the world, of being sent away from his mother. The cutting of the apron-

string is a very painful process. Like the puppy dog's tail it's best done in the very early days when these small operations don't hurt so much. A whole tail quite spoils the look of a decent dog, even though some misguided people allow it to remain out of a sense of humanity. It's the same with the apron-string. It has to be cut if the boy is to grow out of puppyhood.

So we've kept our hearts hardened, and we've had no "scenes—" stoics, both of us, learning one of life's hard lessons.

All the same, I nearly broke down when you were saying your prayers. You thought I didn't notice it, my precious, but you were a long time getting up, and I knew you were kissing the folds of my skirt. It made my heart come into my throat. Oh, how I wanted to hug you!

But I didn't. I tucked you up and left you with a sensible, not too-linger-

ing kiss. I dared not stay. Long after you thought I had gone downstairs I heard you sobbing, fighting with your sobs, horrid breathy sobs—a small man in trouble.

Your boy's busy day had come to an end, and you realized in a rush that this was your *very* last night at home, and that tomorrow night. . . !

I had to fight hard not to come in and howl with you. But that isn't the way to help you. If your dear father had been alive I might have let my mother-feelings go, but I've got to practice some of the manly virtues now.

Keep up, keep up! I *am* sobbing!

Very late.

I have been in to kiss you. You are fast asleep. And you've taken Teddy to bed with you. His head is all sodden —soaked with tears, and oh! in my anxiety to do the right thing, I keep

asking myself whether I am sending you away too soon.

You haven't slept with Teddy for a year.

Why—tonight?

On Utter Solitude

(*Unposted*)

IT is all over. You have gone. The train has swept you and a lot of other boys out of the station, out of my sight. We made our last good-byes quickly and in public. More stoicism. Without it we should both have broken down.

I turned my back and pulled down my veil. It was a long, long platform to traverse before I could gain the shelter of the ladies' waiting-room. It seemed nearly as long as life. I thought I should never get to the end of it. I could not see. And one sob that was meant to be a silent one came out with a sudden breaking noise. Just at the last I could have sworn I heard your

voice cry "Mother!" I nearly turned and raced back, but I kept right on.

Son, I am utterly alone!

On Work, Play, and Decent Language

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

I'm writing to you at once as I promised; but I shall have to wait for *your* letter until Saturday. I am sure you will have a tremendous lot to tell me; and remember I want to know everything. Don't leave anything out. Tell me your whole day's doings, what you think of your school, how you like lessons and games, of the friends you have made and who they are.

I hope you had a jolly journey down. I'm sure you didn't fret. It's so babyish.

I haven't any news to tell you. I am just by myself and nothing is happening. If I were not your mother I should wish to be your elder brother and at school

with you. I think boys are such lucky creatures. Girls don't have half such a good time at school as boys.

It *is* a good time in spite of lessons, even because of them. I wonder if I can make you see that. Really, learning things is interesting, if you don't think of it as a task. Everybody in the world is learning things all the time. Grown-ups, I mean. And they are glad to learn. You have no idea how much every new thing you learn makes you feel more sure of yourself, gives you some advantage over the person who hasn't learnt it. Don't think it a task. It may seem so at first. Boys look at it like that, I know, but that's because the reason for lessons hasn't been properly explained to them.

Listen, think. Ask WHY about everything you don't understand. Keep on asking WHY. Good masters don't mind questions: they take much more interest

in the boy who asks them. It is the boy who doesn't ask because he's inattentive or stupid or doesn't care that the master doesn't like. You are not stupid, and I'm sure you care, so be sure you are not inattentive. Then everything will go smoothly for you. There's another thing about attention. It makes the time pass quicker. It makes the next lesson easier, too, so that in the end lessons don't seem either long or hard.

All the masters at your school are good men, university men, gentlemen. Remember that too. Boys think masters are machines paid to stuff them with bothersome things. That's quite a mistake. Really, it's harder work for them to *teach* than for boys to *learn*. That is why you must show respect for them by doing your best. To be inattentive is rude as well as waste of your own time.

That's enough about work: now for play. Put your heart into your games—cricket, football, rackets. Never mind if you get hurt. You are bound to be sometimes. Games at which you can't get hurt aren't worth playing. Directly you play them decently you won't notice the knocks. I want, above everything, to see you a "blue" some day.

Be modest. Don't think yourself a better man than the other fellows. Don't put on "swank" if you happen to be at the top of your form, or hold a hot return at cricket. Think how much more frequently you'll have cause to sing small because you're nearer the bottom, or the shot at goal has missed! Be chummy with as many boys as you can. If there are any who make you feel like old Kibob when his heckles go up, don't spoil for a fight as he does. Still, if you ever have to fight—fight.

Win if you can, but, if you can't, take a licking like a gentleman and don't bear malice.

By the way, some boys are apt to use very queer words. I should stick to decent language if I were you. Swearing isn't a bit manly, really. Besides, if you get into the habit of it, you might do it in my hearing. It's an appalling thing to use bad language in the presence of a lady. I don't think you *will* come across much bad language at ——, thank Goodness!

If at any time there's anything you don't understand, or are puzzled about, ask me. If there's anything wrong, tell me. There's no sense in bottling it up. It might be something I ought to know. That isn't sneaking. It would be sneaking if I were one of the masters and you were to tell me something that would get another boy into trouble; but I'm your mother, not

a master, so you can tell me *everything*.

There's a long lecture, my son! I shan't repeat it, but don't forget it, all the same.

I shall have lots more to tell you next time I write, I expect. Don't worry about me, darling. I haven't time to miss you. There's such a lot to do, getting ready to leave this house, letting it, and so on.

Good-bye till next week. Write me a long, long letter. Never mind about the spelling.

Your loving

MOTHER.

P. S.—Captain —— has just brought in these stamps for you. He says the surcharged Natal ones are worth having.

Don't forget to put your sweater on when you're hot after a game. That's not coddling. It's sense.

On Taking the Rough with the Smooth

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

I was awfully disappointed to get your letter. I can't possibly write to Mr. J—— and ask him to let you off your swimming lessons. I can't say you're not strong and that accordingly it's bad for you, because you're quite strong and it's good for you. You must learn to swim and to like it. It's silly to think you're drowning because you're thrown in and a lot of water gets in your mouth. Is it likely they would let a boy drown? If the man is a little rough teaching you, you must grin and bear it. Spit out the water and strike out. You can't expect to be taught gently as if you were a girl. *They* have

to be put into luke-warm water and made to flop about on silly ladder things. You'd be sorry to be a girl!

I know you'll think I'm an unsympathetic creature, but, believe me, you need not be afraid. Everybody who learns to swim has the same feelings about it as you have. They don't last. If you think for a moment you will see that the fear of being about to sink is really what stimulates you to try and swim. I won't believe you are a water-funk or indeed a funk of any kind. From what you say I am glad to see that you kept your feelings to yourself, and having been man enough to do that it won't take you long to get over them.

So, buck up, darling. It's all in the day's work, and we've got to take the rough with the smooth.

When you were a little boy, about four, you were a dreadfully impatient

little person. You wanted everything at once. You didn't understand what patience means. One day I tried to explain it to you. I told you that whenever you felt impatient or in a particular hurry to do or get something over you were to say to yourself, "Patience, patience!" *You* pronounced it "Paishon." Well, one day we were in a big field and saw a bull. We couldn't turn tail. We had come too far. You wanted to run. I told you you mustn't, that you must walk slowly as if nothing were the matter, and then the bull wouldn't take any notice of us. You got fearfully red in the face, and gripped tight hold of my hand; and all the time you kept muttering to yourself right across the field: "*Paishon! Paishon! Paishon!*"

You learnt the meaning of it that day.

When you're swimming and feel that you are sinking just remember the bull

in the field, and say "Paishon! Paishon! Paishon!" until you've got to the other side of the bath.

You can't drown, Son. Do you think *I* would let you? Why, I would be writing to your Head every minute of the day if I thought there was the faintest danger of it. As it is, I'm not writing to him at all.

Your loving

MOTHER.

On Sympathy and Martyrdom

(*Unposted*)

MY beloved little Son:

I've just had to write you a *brute* of a letter. It did hurt to do it. I don't know how I got to the letter-box with it or hardened my heart sufficiently to drop it in. In time I shall grow into a *flint* of a woman.

I know you funk it, darling, and I funk it, too. I hate the idea of your shivering, shaking, and spluttering in a nasty cold tank. And Autumn's a cruel time to begin. I would have given anything to have written to your Headmaster begging you off on the plea of a delicate chest. And you'll never know the miserable struggle I had to restrain myself from doing so.

Personally, I hate cold water. I can't understand anyone enjoying it; but for all that, until I hear that you enjoy your swim, I'm going to take a cold plunge every morning, too. If I were a middle-aged woman, I shouldn't do such an idiotic thing, but as I'm young and it can't do me any harm I can make myself uncomfortable and cold out of sympathy with you. But all the same I shan't let my son know what a little fool his "sensible" mother is!

On Coming Home for the Holidays

(*Unposted*)

SWEETHEART! I am a girl today. I am all youth and bright eyes and blushes. Surely I cannot be a grown-up mother-woman who is expecting her son home for his holidays!

Home for the holidays! Hip, hip, hurrah!

Oh, my dear, we have all been so busy getting ready for the master of our house. Cookie (she's the only servant I've got now) has been roasting herself alive in the kitchen. The good things and the cakes she has made!

Your bedroom is ready: the bed made. You will lie in it tonight. My son—under his own roof-tree!

His own roof-tree! Hardly that.

You're coming back to a semi-detached villa, darling.

But there's a big, bursting heart waiting for you!

I'm so afraid you'll be different. I hope you haven't grown out of *all* the dear baby ways that I love so. I can't write. I'm shaking with excitement. I'm just sitting at my bureau scribbling one of my many unposted letters to you, just to make the minutes go until it is time to meet your train.

Will you look at me with the eyes of a critical little boy who sees his mother for the first time as other people see her?

Am I pretty? I do hope you'll think me pretty. Schoolboys love their mothers to be pretty.

I've been quite a long time over my toilette this morning. I've put on a short skirt so that I can run to meet you when I see you on the platform, and I'm

in the colour your father loved best—grey with a touch of rose.

"Hullöa, old girl, what have you got on that dress for? You look very festive."

I put up my face, and draw his down. We rub cheeks affectionately.

"Don't you know what today is, husband?"

"Dash it all, anniversary of our wedding, isn't it? We seem to have about five a year. We haven't been married one yet, sweetheart, have we?"

"Fie, for shame! Do you forget we have an eight-year-old son?"

"Why, so we have. The little chap's coming home today. You didn't think I'd forgotten, Kid? That's why I put a flower in my buttonhole."

I suddenly reach out and hold your hand tight, my husband, and your voice

goes on, lips murmuring against my face.

"Think of it, Kid! It doesn't seem nine years since we first promised not to get tired of each other. What an unnecessary promise, and how easy to keep! Jolly to think we've got the rest of our lives together, and the boy growing up like a young tree of our own planting. Life won't be long enough for us. Isn't it time to meet his train?"

Son, I've been dreaming!

"The rest of our lives together."

It is time for me to meet your train—alone.

"Grey with a touch of rose!"

On a Public School

(*Posted*)

DEAREST——:

I am a wee bit disappointed that the public school I had in mind for you has no vacancy for a long time to come. You are entered for ——.

The T——s have a house there, so I spent last week with them and went over the college. Of course it is historical and backed by fine traditions. It has turned out great men. But I must own that I was not very favourably impressed by the boys I saw wandering about the narrow streets. I don't like their slouch. I hope you won't acquire it. Most of them walked with their hands in their pockets and their hats over their eyes. The wearing of

the elastic behind gives the back of their heads an odd prominence. Some of them looked self-sufficient young creatures! I studied them at close quarters for the best part of the week, comparing them with other public school boys I have met, and I know exactly what's the matter with them, and why.

You hardly ever see a —— boy in a hurry. He saunters. He walks up the hill wearily. His complexion is muddy. He has a lack-lustre expression, and he looks as if he takes no interest in anything.

The —— boy seems chronically bilious. If I were Headmaster I should give every one of them a blue pill and a black draught, shut up all but one of the dozen tuck-shops in the place, and keep that one under my own supervision.

Boys swarm like bees in these tuck-shops. They saunter from one to the other. I have seen the same boys visit

three in one morning. I was lunching in one of them. It was just after the school dinner-hour. A small boy came in, inspected the counter with greedy eyes, gave an order, and sat down at one of the tables. He ate and ate. This is what he had:

Two éclairs,
Lemonade,
A cream horn,
A bath bun,
Another bath bun,
Gingerbeer,
Two sticks of horrible looking rock,
One slice of cake,
Two bananas.

Then he got up slowly, paid listlessly, and slouched out, probably to the next shop up the street. He didn't look a bit ashamed of himself, only sick.

Apparently the boys are not restricted as to what they may or may not eat, either in quality or quantity. All that

seems required of them is that they shall pay for it. I don't like it a little bit, and I hope you'll have sense enough not to follow the gluttonous habit. The —— boy seems to think that life is one vast tuck-shop. I dare say many of the house-masters' wives get worried when they find some of their charges off their feed, and wonder why.

I am fairly sure that the confectioners there do not sell particularly good things. But they make the boys pay enough for them. The wily creatures know that boys are not critical, and they trade on it.

You will ruin your digestion if you go in for tuck on the —— fashion. I suppose it's no good hoping that the system will be altered just because of the whim of one scandalized mother.

Now that I've pointed out what you ought to avoid I shall be most miserable

if, when you've been there a little while, I get a letter from you like this:

"My dear Mother,—Please do send me some more pocket-money. Mine's all gone, though I don't know how. Yesterday in chapel I felt very ill. Everything went a sort of green colour, and I had to go out."

You won't get any sympathy from me!

The sock-and-tie shops seem to run the confectioners fairly close. I saw lots of big fellows stopping to stare in at the dandified things in the windows. Well, socks and ties are comparatively harmless. Indulgence in them won't ruin your constitution.

It also struck me that the —— boys are dreadfully slovenly in their dress. I like to see boys and men shining at both ends—hair and shoes. The —— boy's hair is nearly always ruffled (owing to the elastic), and his shoes never look

properly cleaned. Still, that's not his fault.

The fewness of bathrooms is another thing that I didn't like. Altogether my spirits got quite damped.

But they rose again quickly (like the tuft of hair on top of your head that won't sit down) after I had watched a cricket match. Cricket is a clean and a great game, and the way boys play it tells a careful observer the tone of their school. As long as there's good cricket, the school's all right. Your father said so, and he knew.

I shall be all impatience until you get a study of your own. There's a furnishing shop where you can choose the most splendiferous of arm-chairs, the gayest of cushions, the brightest of rugs. When I went in to buy some trifle I could not help watching and listening to a study-owner who was there with his mother and two grown-up pretty

girl sisters. He was a self-possessed young lord of creation, about thirteen, and they were all tremendously anxious to help him with their advice in the choice of a chair. He cavilled at the patterns, the shapes, the sizes. He sat in one, he sat in another. He made his mother and his sisters sit, and finally he chose a nobbley-looking one that bulged in all the places it shouldn't, because as he explained, "the red stuff will go so well with my yellow curtains."

"I'm decorating my study in the Morris style," he went on. "Lots of the fellows are this term. It's not too easy, mater, to get a Morris effect on a fiver!"

The mother and sisters smiled admiringly and chorussed "How *nice*!"

I went to a service in chapel on Sunday. In the choir I spotted the boy who had been eating so outrageously, and whose menu I have given you. He

looked white-faced and angelic. The sun shining through one of the stained-glass windows gave him a beautiful appearance. He sang a solo in a soaring, soulless alto. If I had been his mother, his beautiful voice and his look of fragility would have brought tears to my eyes. As it was I could only think of him as a sort of confectioner's dustbin.

Nevertheless, there is something about a school service that touches one very deeply. As I sat among this congregation of boys in this world-famed school for the sons of gentlemen, boys of all ages, sizes, and of various nationality, I could not help speculating about their future, on the sort of men they would become, on all that life might or might not give them. Some will be powers in the land—a few hold high office; some will achieve greatness, some by virtue of birth and tradition are already great; some will illumine the world of litera-

ture, science, art; some will explore the dark places of the earth; some will be the nation's defenders. Out of every hundred how many? And the rest, what of them? The majority will disappear and be heard of no more. A residue—a small one, thank God—will come to grief, all the more disastrous because of the height from which they fall.

Boys in the crucible of life!

Thinking these thoughts when I knelt in the very chapel where you will kneel, darling, my whole heart went out to God in prayer for you.

And the Benediction echoed that prayer aloud for every mother's son:

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,

be amongst you and remain with you always."

"Always!" Amen.

Son, be good! It would break my heart if you were not.

On a Voice

(*Unposted*)

TODAY I heard a man's voice in the kitchen.

"A great big plum cake, cook. And don't be mean with the currants."

For a minute I could not think who it could be. Had cook, at forty, a confirmed spinster, succumbed to the fascinations of "a young man?" It couldn't be you. Your voice was all cracks and squeaks at breakfast.

It came again, very distinctly.

"You're a dear old thing! I'll have a slice now. Buck up!"

My heart beat violently. A rush of tears came into my eyes, for I heard the voice of your father across the gulf of fifteen years.

I opened the kitchen door and went in.

As I might have expected, I saw a rather lanky boy perched on the kitchen table, swinging his legs, a huge slab of cake in his hand.

And then cook, in the tone of one announcing a visitor:

"Master ——'s new voice is come, ma'am."

"Y-es, cook."

"And, begging your pardon, ma'am, isn't it like the dear master's?"

I nodded, eyes blind.

"Have a slice, mother?" came my husband's voice, from the lips of my schoolboy son.

On Certain Subjects that Puzzle Youth

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

How time flies! It seems only the other day, or a month or two at most, that you were a dear little fat creature in tunic and short trousers. I have to think quite hard to realize that you're a great, tall, growing sixteen-year-old public school man.

Perhaps your letter and some of the things you ask me in it bring me to earth with a bit of a shock! Very soon, even before I'm an elderly woman, you'll be a man.

It makes it rather difficult for me, dear, because I am not yet elderly, and I am rather shy. But I'll put my shyness in my pocket.

Read what I am going to say very carefully. Big Pal is talking.

You came into the world like all babies in the ordinary, extraordinary way. There is no mystery about it at all, and nothing whatever to be ashamed of. Men and women worthy the name don't discuss these subjects for two reasons. Firstly, because they understand them, secondly because they concern that deepest and most beautiful emotion in the world called Love.

In a measure, you know what love is already. I love you. You love me. Yet, you wouldn't go bragging to other men about how much you love me. You are reticent about that very love because it is so sacred, so deep inside of you. The other love—without which we should not have our being—is sacred in the same sense.

You love me in a great deep unexplainable way because you are part of

your father. And your father loved me. Do you follow that? The rest of you *is* me.

I loved your father as only a woman can, because I wished him to make me the mother of you.

If you do not understand that go to any one of the masters you are friends with and ask him what you want to know. Then come back and read this.

Now you understand that men, and even boys who are growing into men, owe a duty to all women for the sake of their mothers.

All women are not good; all men are not good; all boys are not good.

You must know that. You can be sorry for that, but it need not otherwise concern you. You can help to make the world a better place, not by preaching but simply by living a decent life now and when you are older thinking decent thoughts.

Some boys and young men think it is funny to joke and make light of subjects that nicer people do not talk about. One of the truest and tritest of sayings is that "familiarity breeds contempt." The wrong kind of familiarity is meant. The right kind is synonymous with love. So, in the same way, if you become wrongly familiar with subjects that should be sacred to you, I assure you that in later years you will lose the greatest joy life can give. You will blunt the edge of the emotion that leads a man to choose a good wife, make a good home, be a good father and a good man.

Love, if you let it come to you at the right time, which is the Appointed Time, can be, will be, the Poem of Life, the Crown of Existence.

My poem was one short verse.

Once you understand it, put this subject out of your mind. The time to

know more about it is not yet. It is sacred. I cannot say the word often enough. Death is sacred. Birth is sacred. All things that concern life vitally are sacred. Never joke about them. You are not yet old enough to know whether a joke is in good taste or bad taste, merely funny or merely vulgar.

Remember, too, if you should be led into a discussion of these subjects with other boys you would be making light unwittingly of the most intimate events in your mother's life, events associated with her greatest happiness and her greatest pain. Therefore I feel sure you will not do it. Nice boys keep off such matters for the same reason that nice people do.

Now I've used up so many sheets of paper in trying to clear up the fog I could see you were in that I have very little room left to tell you actual bits of

news. I shall have to give them to you in headlines, like the daily papers.

The carpenter has just finished making your butterfly case. Shall I send it on or keep it for you until the holidays?

I can't get a tie *exactly* the shade of the sock you sent, but Captain —— bought the enclosed in the Burlington Arcade. Although it isn't a very good match it's a jolly nice tie. Write and thank him for it.

I am so glad you have enjoyed reading *Stalky & Co.* Do you know, ever since you have been a schoolboy I have read it in bed every night of my life. Bible in the morning. *Stalky & Co.* at night. I think I know it by heart. Isn't it fine where McTurk, forgetting he is a schoolboy caught poaching, rounds on the keeper for shooting a fox, and talks to Colonel Daubeney as "man to man?" And the chapter called an "Unsavoury Interlude," in which Beetle

and Stalky retaliate on Heffy's house by means of the dead cat? And I love the dear, sly, tolerant, Padre with his big understanding heart for these young rips.

Stalky's war-verse is set to music in my mind. I'm often humming it.

"Arrah, Patsy, mind the baby!
Arrah, Patsy, mind the child!
Wrap him up in an overcoat,
He's surely goin' wild!"

You can forgive Stalky & Co. all the outlandish things they did when you read the last chapter, and see what fine men they became. It's a chapter to make one choke, and then to turn back and read again the poem at the beginning. It doesn't properly soak into you until you've finished the book.

"Western wind and open surge
Took us from our mothers;
Flung us on a naked shore
(Twelve bleak houses by the shore
Seven summers by the shore!)
'Mid two hundred brothers.

"Let us now praise famous men—
Men of little showing—
For their work continueth,
And their work continueth,
Broad and deep continueth
Greater than their knowing!"

Your father had a veneration for Kipling, something even deeper than that. He was an unemotional man, but Kipling stirred him immensely. He could never manage to read the *Barrack Room Ballads* without breaking down. He once described the effect they had on him in these words: "It's as if the man actually digs his pen into one's stomach and twists it there." I think Kipling takes all *real* men like that. Effeminate men and most women are unable to appreciate him.

The power of the pen is a wonderful thing, Son. If you write at all, I want you to write like that—real, live stuff, stuff for men and the women who are the wives and mothers of men.

But I'm forgetting you're only sixteen. Anyway, this letter must go. I haven't time to write another.

Your devoted

MOTHER.

On the Joys of Wandering

(*Posted*)

DARLING:

You ask me to think of a new and jolly way to spend the summer holidays, especially as C—— is coming to stay with you. Now what can we do? I know the house is "beastly" small, and that you can't swing a cat in the rooms. And there's no garden. Rotten! I quite agree.

I can't afford to hire a car, or we'd go on a motoring tour. And Captain —— is abroad, so he can't help us with a brilliant notion. Let me sit with my head in my hands and think.

I've got it!

We'll take tickets to Devonshire, Somerset or wherever you like, and

we'll walk back. We'll camp out. We'll be gipsies, rogues, and vagabonds. We'll have the jolliest time. I've done it, so I know.

Years ago, when I was seventeen, and a most unrecognizable madcap, I walked from Cornwall to Kent with a girl friend. We slept in inns, and we lived on milk, butter, honey, and eggs. We started with all sorts of luggage, silver-backed hair-brushes, boot-trees, and our groceries. But we sent our dressing-cases home the first day, shed other things as we went along, and finally reduced our luggage to a frying-pan. After that we enjoyed ourselves. We bathed every day in the delightful rocky coves you find everywhere along the Cornish coast, and afterwards in the streams we came across. And we washed our clothes and waited till they were ready to put on again. We had a most rough-dried appearance when we arrived home,

but we were as brown as berries and felt splendid.

When spring comes round, even now that I'm a sensible old mother, I begin to feel a stirring in me—a sap-rising sort of feeling—and I long to wander.

Just to wander. Men get the feeling. It's as old as the hills. It takes them into strange countries and makes them discover things. It took Livingstone to Africa, Scott to the South Pole, Columbus to America. Poor old Sir Walter Raleigh had it badly. Girls get it too, sometimes, but they can't give way to it, because girls generally have to stay at home. It's the same instinct, I suppose —this call to "go"—that takes the salmon to the sea, and the reindeer to the salt water. But it's healthy, and it's natural, and it's *ripping*. Christ said, "Take up your bed and walk." I often think He meant it in more ways than one. Walking, wandering, is a

sort of soul medicine for grown-up people, just as eating a special grass along the roadside is good for dogs. For you boys it will be just a jolly adventure.

Of course if I come I shall have to carry a little luggage because it doesn't do to look an idiot at my age, and, besides, you wouldn't like your mother to resemble a new-art, fresh-air crank. I shall wear a light tweed walking-dress, and a sailor hat. I promise you I'll look *smart* and workmanlike.

Talking of looking "smart" reminds me of when you were at your preparatory school. I don't suppose you remember the letter you wrote me in your second term? "Darling Mother, the school sports will be next week. Bring so and so. For goodness sake *come smart!*"

Well, how does the idea of a walking tour suit you? Talk it over with C——, and let me know.

You boys need only wear old grey flannels, and carry a rolled mack each. I shall sleep in inns. You can sleep in haystacks or anywhere you like on fine nights.

Of course you and C—— could go alone, but I should very much like to come too if you feel that I shan't spoil it. I shall at least be useful with the frying-pan!

On the Death of an Old Dog

(*Posted*)

POOR dear old faithful Kibob is dead. I know how sorry you will be. When you went back this term I had a feeling that he knew he would not see you again. The weight of his years lay very heavily on him at the last. He grew so sad. He had taken to a strange and eerie habit of late. He would go off for solitary walks, and then I would hear long-drawn howls, and following the sound find old Kibob, standing stock still, pointing at nothing that I could see, and at intervals throwing up his head to intone a mournful, tuneless note.

When I got near enough to call him he would come to me with ponderous gladness, wagging his tail as fast as he

could, which was not really as fast as he used to. I never could find out the reason why he bayed in broad daylight. Perhaps he felt so old and tired that he despaired of death coming to him unless he called it.

Of course it is only natural that he should have died. Fourteen is a ripe old age for a dog. We can console ourselves that in return for his canine love we have given him all that human beings can give a four-footed friend—understanding, care, kindness, exercise, food, a warm bed. He has never known a cross word or a blow since he was a puppy, and those which had to be administered to make of him a perfect gentleman whose kennel was our house, must long ago have faded from his mind. His days have been one long chapter of food, the chase, human companionship, dog-meetings, friendships, fights, and dreams.

Somewhere old Kibob is waiting. We'll think he heard his master calling. When we next see him he won't be old Kibob as we remember him, toothless and battle-scarred, but Kibob in his prime, Kibob who could race a motor car for thirty glorious breathless seconds and then miraculously escape death. I can't imagine a heaven without dogs, can you?

Just at the end he was in pain and very weak, so I sent for the vet. to help him over the last stile. But the vet. was a long time coming, and after I had given a half teaspoonful of brandy I sat by him holding his paw. Every now and then he kept on lifting his head and looking at the door.

"Our little master's at school," I said.

He looked at me, and I verily believe he understood. My last words to him in this world were:

"Kiss me for little master." (You've seen him do it.)

He put his burning nose against my hand, and kissed it—for little master.

Ten minutes later he died, and we lost a friend.

Dear old Kibob! May he not feel lonely in the trackless hunting-grounds!

On a Declaration of Faith

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

I'm so glad you've told me. I guessed something of the sort was going on inside you, and I was afraid you would keep it bottled up. Now that you have spoken of it of your own accord I can advise and I think help you. Fancy imagining I should be shocked or angry! Why, dear, I've been through the same thing myself—doubts of God, doubts of everything, savage mistrust.

You're seventeen, and what you tell me only shows that you have begun to think a bit sooner than most boys, that's all. But you haven't thought enough. You say you've read *Darwin* and *Haeckel*, and you can't believe there is a God, and

that you're an atheist, and therefore I must think you wicked.

I don't. You've got to a blank wall, and you can't see over it. The wall illustrates your own mental limitations. Surmount those and your view won't be restricted.

I too have read *Darwin* and *Haeckel.* Some of their conclusions I understand and some I don't, because of the technicalities. Like you I once thought there was no God. And I now know there IS. Darwin or Haeckel, if you come to think of it, do not deny the existence of a Deity. They were much too clever. What they do destroy is the conventional idea of heaven and hell. But they don't destroy God. They might as well have tried to argue against the organization of the universe. They didn't do that. They merely demolished the wrong kind of faith. But they give you something in its

place. They expound a consecutive, scientific line of thought that should lead you straight to a real conception of the true God—the Infinite Mind. They destroyed once and forever the Biblical, anthropomorphic idea of a white-bearded Deity with a crotchety temper and other human attributes.

After I had lost faith in the bewildering maze of dogmatic statements and meaningless Church forms, I set my own mind at work to try and find out whether there *was* a Thinking Creator. It seemed obvious that there must be in Nature something more than a mere haphazard dictator of fortuitous circumstance. Everything in Nature is thought out. Everything is too obviously planned for it to be chance.

Of course this is a woman's reasoning, and clever men might pick holes in it. But they couldn't say I was fundamentally wrong. In building up a theory of

God they know no more and perhaps a little less than I do, because they go by cold reason, and I go by *feeling*. Feeling, which is intuition, takes one right over the stumbling-blocks that strew the path of reason. Intuition is seldom wrong.

Well, intuition tells me there is a God, and reason backs me up. You will see why directly.

So you've got God back, or you ought to have.

Think of that as a fact by itself. You needn't associate it with questions of religion. You needn't go into a consideration of all the forms religion has taken, all the deities men have worshipped—Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, the Heathen and Greek gods. All that doesn't matter. Let me tell you simply of the one God that does—the one God I believe in.

Let us think about His attributes. Until we have some conception of them

we can't argue as to God's attitude towards us, or see how much or how little the individual means in the scheme of things.

God is an Artist. Think of that first and foremost. I hardly need to prove it to you. Everything in Nature is beautiful. A sunset will tell you that God is an Artist.

God cares sufficiently to make this world we live in (one of many) beautiful to us and for us. A flower smells sweet. True, it's scent attracts the bee, but it also pleases us.

God cares sufficiently to give us pleasurable emotions. Look at your life now. Isn't it a pleasant one? But it might *not* have been. Youth, whether it is passed in a good school or the gutter is full of pleasures. Even the slum-child has its joys. Pleasure is of course relative, but in either case it must have been ordained.

As life goes on our pleasures are increased, not lessened. And in addition we are given another gift, about which you ask—Love.

Love is sublime. Together with an emotion that might have been purely physical and fleeting, provided merely for the perpetuation of the race, God has incorporated a love which is spiritual in its essence, and above all, enduring. Then from this miraculous blend of two emotions which one would have said could never be brought into relation with each other, we get another love, that of parents for their children. Besides these emotions, there are others which give rise to the attributes of courage, heroism, self-sacrifice, and many other virtues. They all partake of the Divine. They all show that God cares.

And then when you've got as far as that, you come to another blank wall. I couldn't see over mine for a long time.

This was it: Assuming that God cares, what is the reason for sin, suffering, death—above all death?

The answer to the first is simple: We need not sin. Consciously, I mean. We are thinking beings, and the choice between right and wrong has been left to our discretion. The touch of Divinity in us ought to guide us in that choice. That it does not always do so only shows that we are spiritually imperfect, and mentally lacking in discretion. In other words, sin is ignorance. We can get rid of ignorance by cultivating our intellect. The more intellectual we become the less we sin. Does the reasoning appeal to you? Anyway, take this advice: don't think about sin, and avoid it when it comes your way.

But death?

God seems callous about death. To us it is of the deepest import, because as we understand life it is the end.

But in God's seeming callousness I read the most hopeful message of all. Death does not imply an end. He never meant us to look at it like that or that we should think and speak of it with bated breath as a dread thing. Death is only one of Nature's changes. It ought to be regarded without fear. Fear of death came with the lust not the love of life. I love life. I loved it more once. But I have never been afraid of death. I love it, I think, as it was meant to be loved. When it is time for me to go I shall be ready and resigned.

So death, I honestly believe, is nothing to God, and for that reason we ought not to deplore it. So much lies beyond.

Something *must* lie beyond. I don't know what it is. My mind is too insignificant to inform me. What it does tell me is this: that in whatever lies

beyond there will be some of the things we understood in this life—the vital things that must endure *because* there is no end to them, *because* they are part of the very attributes of God. Beauty. Love. Joy.

Even the greatest sorrow in my life—the loss of your dear father—will, I feel, be atoned for by death. I know that in some way, perhaps in some amplified way, he will be restored to me. Else why has the physical tie between us been severed?—a tie that I feel to be after seventeen years as strong and deep as it was at the beginning. There must be a reason.

Darling son, have I helped you at all? It is so difficult, especially for me, so unskilled in logic, to give reasons for my deepest beliefs or to express them convincingly and concisely. All I know is, they are convincing to me.

You see now that in the accepted sense

of the word I am not religious. I do not believe in a lot of things.

But on the other hand, I do not scoff at other people's beliefs. They may mean as much to them as mine do to me. I have always gone regularly to Church. I counsel you to do likewise. It is a pity to brand oneself as ungodly by stopping away, when one is nothing of the sort. Besides, there is always something beautiful, something true, in every form of religion. Even a whole-hearted dancing dervish has a spark of divinity in him.

I do believe with all my heart in prayer, in the same way as I believe in telephony and wireless telegraphy. There is a scientific truth in the Biblical injunction: "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."

For instance, I love you with all my heart. But when you're away from me,

I can't send you the things you want, or answer your questions, unless you put yourself into communication with me.

Now, God, the Creator, is a great law-maker. Law governs the tiniest thing you can conceive. There are general laws and particular laws. One of the particular laws is that you must look for a thing if you want to find it: It doesn't come of itself to you. So, also, I believe it is a law that one must pray for what one wants, establish communication between oneself and the Deity, and not expect the Deity to be a sort of thought-reading present-giver. Ask for what you want with a "please" and say "thank you" like a gentleman when you get it. If it doesn't come off, pray *harder*. Half-hearted prayers don't get there. They are lost on the way.

Prayer isn't a question of saying "I want so and so. Please, God, give it to

me." You've got to put some force behind the prayer, just as there must be power behind the telephone message to send it to its destination. You know the wooden ball in which the shop-people put the bill and money and then send rolling on wires to the pay-desk? They have to give something or other a jerk to start it off, don't they? Well, prayers need a vigorous send-off, too.

Very few people cultivate the science of prayer. If they did, most wonderful things would be happening in the world.

As it is, the system is nearly as imperfect as that of the telephone. The current is weak or the connection is imperfect; lines get crossed, or someone interrupts. All sorts of difficulties arise.

Still, there is that method of communication, and it is meant to be used.

Think it over, darling.

This is, after all, a declaration of your mother's faith.

And the world would say I am a heathen!

On Going Without

(Unposted)

SOMETIMES I wonder if I am doing too much for you. Can I do too much? My heart says "No." And since you do not know what I am doing, it cannot spoil you.

To give you all the things you need necessitates my going without in a way you could not possibly dream of, thank God. I would not let you know for worlds. It is as well for your peace of mind that probably you will never know. A boy is an expensive thing, and as he gets older needs more—money and clothes. But you are a good boy. You only have what other boys have. The pity of it is that I have such a little to give you, son of my body and heart! It

leaves only a trifle over for the little mother who sits at home, and I grudge even that, for I would like to give you all.

Of course you judge by what you see in the holidays. But I save up for that time.

It is, after all, no great self-sacrifice on my part. I have merely reduced going without to a fine art. For the last two or three years I have insisted upon "Cookie" taking a temporary place and only coming to me for the holidays. She demurred at first, the dear, because she was quite sure I couldn't look after myself. She even offered to stay on without wages. I thanked her with all my heart and told her that even were I willing to accept such a sacrifice (which I was not) I could still not afford to keep her, whereat she offered to "board herself." I fell on her neck and wept at such sheer devotion; but I carried the day, and

in the end she went. I think Cookie always had *pâté de foie gras* designs upon me by the way she seemed to think I needed to be fed. She would be appalled if she knew how I manage on so few shillings a week! And yet I always have an egg for breakfast except when, as the woman who sells them puts it, "eggs is up." Then I have bread and butter and coffee. Bacon being always "up," is out of the question. I often go without lunch altogether. It means something extra for you, a tie or socks, and why eat when one is not hungry? I can always have tea a little earlier.

Dinner is generally a most sustaining meal, although it only consists of one course. Captain ——, as well as "Cookie," seems to be obsessed by the *pâté de foie gras* fancy, and so I often find myself rich in a jar of turtle soup, or some such luxury.

That's one way of economizing. I

have others. I hardly ever buy a new frock. It's a case of adapting the old ones to circumstances—and change of weather! Occasionally, I make a guinea or so with my pen. That means an extra treat of some kind in the holidays. The last guinea was for thirty-six words on a postcard! That's sevenpence a word; and I've always understood that newspaper people only get a penny a line. Who says literature is ill-paid? My thirty-six words were "On the best way of using up stale bread."

But I earned another guinea in a less mundane way. It was for this:

He travelled, oh so joyously
  Along the paths of Truth.
No cloud or sorrow anywhere,
  For God had given Youth.

Then, as the way grew harder
  And the sun shone hot above,
God in His understanding
  Gave him the gift of Love.

At last when he grew weary
And panted for each breath
God in His tender mercy
Sent him his last gift—Death!

Perhaps if I had begun earlier I might have tried to write seriously. I must possess the *cacoëthes scribendi* or I should not in my lonely hours unburden my heart by writing unposted letters to my son.

I was all too interested in your father's short career to bother about one of my own. He used to let me correct some of his proofs—high honour! And sometimes I would shyly make a suggestion, and sometimes he would adopt it.

But Fleet Street, he used to say, is no place for a woman, and not much of a place for a man. The old bohemianism is dead. The new bohemianism is debased by the halfpenny press. Men of letters are few and far between, and have withdrawn into mountain fast-

nesses where they can be heard bewailing the price of bread.

So perhaps it's just as well that I confine myself to making money in the thriftiest way—by *saving* it. For you, darling.

Which reminds me that, so far, my coal bill has been nearly nil. I do all my cooking on an oil-stove. And when it's rather extra cold, as it is at the present moment, I put my feet on a cushion, wrap myself in a rug, and warm my fingers by blowing on them.

I *had* to tell a lie yesterday afternoon.

Captain —— dropped in unexpectedly. He seldom comes without first letting me know. I hadn't a fire anywhere in the house, and I couldn't ask him into the kitchen where the tiny oil-stove was alight. Nor could I pretend it was warm, because it was one of the coldest days we've had this winter. I put a match to the drawing-room fire at once,

and apologized for the chilliness by saying I had a fire in my bedroom. Before I knew what he was going to do he had taken my hands in his—just for a moment to feel them.

"God forgive you, you sweet liar," he said. "If that boy of yours doesn't thank you in after years he ought to be—" He was too moved to finish the sentence.

Darling, darling! I don't ask you to thank me in after years. I only want you to love me always. I only want to be proud of you. I want to do what your father would have done for you.

What is cold or hunger or a little privation? I am the mother of a son, and there is glory in my heart.

On Dreams

(*Unposted*)

DO you dream, Son? And what are your dreams?

It is night, and I suppose you are asleep.

How people's dreams vary! They vary as much as the leaves on a tree—not one alike.

Do you ever dream of me? Sometimes when I'm sitting idle at night, a little too tired to read or sew, I try and will myself into your dreams. I hope I haven't come in at an inopportune moment. I should hate to spoil a fine catch, or a big hit, even in a dream. But on the other hand it would be jolly to arrive in time to divert a swishing, or write your impot

for you, or make some wrong come right.

But I suppose if you do dream your dreams are of Games and Boys, and not of the mother who is yearning for you at a distance. You love her sensibly and properly as a boy should. She's very nice to see in the holidays, and a good pal—considering she's a woman. And you're proud to be seen about with her on Speech Days, because even the masters thought she was your sister; but she doesn't absorb your waking or dreaming life. She has her proper place in the special niche where boys and men keep their mothers and sisters. It is only in after years that the niche is transformed into a shrine, made beautiful by the pale flowers of memory or the withered leaves of regret.

As a sign of perfect health perhaps it is best you should not dream at all. But I cannot help thinking that the

person whose sleep is dreamless must be something of a dull dog. Even dogs dream—dogs of any imagination, that is.

Indeed, dogs dream a lot. One can tell that by the twitching of their limbs as they lie asleep, their muted barks and whines. The reason why they dream so much is obvious. Light sleep is the dream-sleep. Deep sleep is dreamless. Dogs sleep very lightly. So it is with human beings.

It seems to me there is not a moment of my sleep-time that I do not dream. They are mostly nonsensical visions: I am a girl at school, or I have discovered untold wealth in the shape of jewels and gold, or I'm serenely driving a motor car and suddenly discover I neither know how to turn round or stop, and oddly enough it doesn't distress me in the least.

Once I dreamt I was a mutton-chop.

A most ridiculous dream. I was going to be served for your father's lunch, and all the time Cookie was trimming and preparing me I suffered a nightmare fear lest I should be *tough!*

Your father, who was a good shot and loved shooting, had one stock dream. He would give a short, sharp shout and a spasmodic kick, and I would wake him up and ask what was the matter.

"Oof! Stepped on a rabbit!" he would mumble, and go to sleep again.

Sometimes my dreams are sad. Once I dreamt that you had died, darling. And I sat with empty hands and a heart like a waste of waters.

Oftenest of all I dream that your father is alive. The same dream, always.

In this dream I am wandering somewhere about the house—always the Old House, never here—and suddenly, unexpectedly, I come face to face with

my heart's beloved. A cry is strangled in my throat. I rush into his arms. I feel them close round me tightly, and I smell the dear familiar peaty odour of Connemara tweeds.

"I thought you were dead!" I sob, laughing and crying, "I thought you were dead!"

He laughs then, boyishly, reassuringly, with the touch of tenderness he always showed when emotion had hold of me.

"Silly little woman! Always dreaming! And what a nonsensical dream! I'm here. Don't cry, you goose. Dead men can't kiss. Dead men haven't arms to hold you. Wake up. It's only a dream!"

And I do wake, choking.

I sit up in bed, the loved voice still echoing in my ears, still smelling the peaty tweeds.

Where am I? Where is he? Which

is the dream? The dream or the reality? I grope for matches, light the candle to find myself in the "best bedroom" of a rented villa, with nothing left me of my life's dream but the faded photograph of a man by my bedside, and a son at a public school.

I cannot tell you the torture of that dream. Every night I dread its coming. For, when it does, I know that it is a dream, and that for one brief moment I shall believe it is not a dream to wake and find that it *is* a dream!

But one day, one day, oh my heart, I shall dream it for the last time, *knowing* that I dream it for the last time, and —I shall wake . . .

On a First Term at College

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

Public school is behind you. You are no longer a lanky boy in swallow tails and a peculiar straw hat, but a full-fledged undergrad. Will the sudden emancipation from school restraint to the comparative liberty of college life be a danger to you? I hope not. Still, you must go carefully, like a young horse learning his paces. Give him his lead too soon and he will come down. *You* mustn't come a cropper.

I'm afraid this must be rather a preachy letter, dear. If your father were alive, he would have taken you into his study and talked to you—man's talk to a man-child. He most certainly

would have put you up to things that I, being a woman, can't. So, poor substitute though I am, I must try and point out to you the tremendous importance of the next few years in your life.

I am very seldom able to *say* serious things to you. When you are at home, so big and tall, and more and more like your father, I feel such a *little* mother, and your manner is so grown-up and protecting that the wise words won't come. I'm so afraid the idea of my advising you will strike you as ludicrous. Still, I've got to do my best.

At the varsity you are going to find out for the first time the real meaning of money. Not only its value for purchasing purposes but how much or how little other people think of you according to the amount you possess. You won't need to go about with a placard round your neck announcing the size of your income. The densest of people

in common with the clever ones have this peculiar gift: they know whether you are rich or poor. I think it is the one surviving instinct of the savage state. We have lost all the others and developed this one to an incredible degree.

Poverty or wealth, like the heel of Achilles, is humanity's vulnerable spot. Therefore don't try to hide it. Yours is the heel of comparative poverty. It is nothing to be ashamed of. Only vulgar people try to cover it up: gentlemen never do. At the varsity and also in later life you will make this discovery: that a frank admission of slender means makes other people credit you with honesty and like you all the better for it.

I tell you this because you will meet a certain number of the vulgar ones who foolishly strive to conceal their poverty and also some of the few who go

through life flaunting their wealth. I don't know which are the more contemptible. The worst for you at Cambridge will be the sons of wealthy parvenus. Wealthy parvenus and their offspring are more blatant than they used to be, now that they can get into the universities. Once they couldn't, or they had no ambitions that way. Then the universities existed solely for the sons of gentlemen.

I daresay the parvenu's son is often decent enough; but equally often he isn't. His home environment is wrong. He has no traditions behind him. He holds the mistaken idea that money puts him on a level with birth. Rather higher in fact. The worst of it is he is often encouraged in that idea by sycophantic young snobs who sponge on him. It inflates him with his own importance and makes him look down on his superiors in birth and brains, just as the

over-educated Hindu ends by thinking slightingly of our race. But in both cases the veneer is very thin. Scratch it and you expose the uncivilization of the native and the ignoble soul of the plebeian boy.

At school the moral damage that a child of ready-made wealth can accomplish is limited to his pocket money. But at the university his allowance—opulence to a person of moderate means—makes him a danger to others. At home he has grown accustomed to hear his father talk of money: now that he has it he can't resist making "money talk." And because he is young and foolish, because his tastes are unrefined, and because his instincts are not manly, he makes it talk badly. He makes it speak in terms of extravagance—expensive meals, champagne, loud friendships, low associations, unnatural gaiety—all the things that are not nice.

It is this type of person you should avoid. When you are older you will avoid him instinctively, classing him as a "howling cad" or an "awful bounder." Which reminds me that what I said about the over-educated Hindu is only meant to apply to the native student in India. I know that many of the Orientals at Cambridge and Oxford are quite what the Americans call "white men."

Perhaps, after all, I need not have urged all this. You know plenty of other men who have gone up to Cambridge this term—men of your own class. You are bound to foregather with them from choice. I also hope that you'll attend lectures and study enough to make quite sure of your "Little-go." I don't want you to swat, dear, nor to neglect such things as rowing, cricket and "rugger." There's time for all and each.

You don't say whether you are a wet-bob or not. Of course I would dearly like you to get a place in the varsity boat, and one day see you paddling back from Mortlake, one of the winning crew. But that's looking a long way ahead. It will be time enough to think of that when your college boat has bumped its way to the top of the river. What I'm thinking of just now is sitting in a skiff next May with you pulling me along those delightful "backs."

I knew your batting was better than you thought. I suppose it's that late cut of yours that has helped to get you into the Fresher's eleven? I specially want to see you one day at Lord's—lifting them over the Pavilion! I know I shall make a silly of myself, howling with joy if you do.

I'm glad you were lucky enough to get rooms in college. It must be better to

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be at the mercy of your "bedder" than a rapacious landlady. I much prefer too the airy simplicity of your quarters in —— to the stuffiness of lodgings with their hideous wall-papers and gimcrack furniture. And then again how infinitely inferior is the confined view of a dull street to the green and quiet beauty of the quad which your windows overlook. I daresay rooms in college mean that you are subjected to a little stricter discipline, but I shan't sympathize with you about that. You share it with a lot of other men better than yourself.

Do be regular at morning chapel. Don't get proctorized and don't get gated—more than you can help! Only milksops steer completely clear of these two troubles, I suppose. I don't want you to be a milksop. Keep to the happy mean. In joining the Union you did exactly what I wished. But go there

to listen and ultimately to speak. It has been a nursery for some of the best of English orators. Who knows but that one day you will get into Parliament. Then the amateur politics of the Union will have been a fine groundwork for you to base professional ones on. It is also good training for the Bar.

Talking of politics and the Bar reminds me that your father would have taken History and Roman Law for his tripos had he gone up to Cambridge. He used to say that a sound knowledge of these two subjects was all-important to anyone engaged in literary work, and equally essential to the politician. To that he added that ignorance of the lessons of history bred sedition, and was responsible for all the frothy, meaningless tub-thumping of demagogues. It's early yet for you to decide on a career, but if you find you have a leaning to-

wards either literature, politics or the Bar, there is your sainted father's recipe for attaining success in any one of the three.

On a Twenty-First Birthday

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

I wish it had not been term-time, so that I could have had my twenty-one-year-old giant at home to congratulate and kiss. As it is you will have been twenty-one quite a good few hours by the time you receive this and the little parcel of relics which I send with all my heart's love. The watch was your father's, and I beg of you to treasure it. I know you will at first. It's old-fashioned and not keyless, but don't let those two shortcomings make you think less of it. Its value—apart from its intrinsic good qualities—ought to lie in its associations. It was your father's father's, so don't part with it.

If ever you should be tempted to do so—and it's no good shutting one's eyes to the fact that young men are sometimes tempted to part with things—just stop and think for one moment. You will hear my voice say "Keep it."

I hope you will like the ring. I have taken out the license for you to wear it. I like our motto, don't you? *Nec venale auro.* Not to be bought with gold! That's old-fashioned too—the sentiment, I mean. A *nouveau riche* in search of armorial bearings would steer clear of such a motto! Another reason for pride in it.

And, last of all, I'm sending you your father's copy of Roget's *Thesaurus.* "The literary man's prompter," I once heard it called. Whether you decide to be literary or not you will find it useful. There is not a page in it that your father's eyes have not conned, not an alternative word that he has not

pondered over at some time or other. He was such a stylist, such a stickler for the right word in the right place. Here and there you will find pencil marks and notes. Even now, after the long years it has lain unused, I can still faintly smell the tobacco of which it was redolent.

God bless you, my darling boy. To-day you come into nothing more substantial than manhood's estate. It is a vast heritage for all that. You hold it for life—virgin soil to cultivate as you will. You were born at three o'clock on a summer's morning. I remember that dawn so well. I remember your being placed in my arms. I remember being almost afraid of your littleness. I remember the wonderful, indescribable emotion that thrilled me when I saw your little downy head nestling in my arm. I had to repeat over and over to myself, "You are a mother. This is

your *very own* baby," before I could believe it was really all true. I had a dream-like sensation that I should wake up and find I was a little girl who had gone to bed with her dolly.

Curiously enough I wasn't a bit anxious to know whether you were a boy or a girl. I forgot to ask. After some time your father came up and drew the bedclothes away from your face and looked at you. *How* he looked! And then he kissed me and whispered: "Thank you so much, my darling-dear, for our little son."

"Oh, is it a boy?" I asked.

And even the nurse laughed.

I tell you these most intimate things because they concern you. They are the baby memories every mother keeps with the put-away baby clothes.

I remember too, as I held you in my arms, how I marvelled just to lie and watch you *breathing*. It was wonderful!

And now you are twenty-one, a brawny six-footer, with a man's voice and a man's ways, and sometimes it is difficult to credit you could ever have been that helpless little lump of flesh, my baby.

I want to tell you before I finish this letter, dear, how pleased and proud you have made me in all these years. I don't think you have ever forgotten that I am your little *widowed* mother. Not even when you were a small boy. And in your school life, too, I have reason to be thankful. You've been a *brick*, son! Your father would have been so pleased and proud. He wanted you to be a good all-round worker and player. I have always carried these words of his in my memory, and I tell them to you now that you are old enough to appreciate them. Take them as his birthday wish, darling:

"I want my son to go through life with a straight bat."

Your

MOTHER.

On Sentence of Death

(*Unposted*)

MY darling-dear:

It is springtime. The world is young again and instinct with new life. The morning air is full of the earthy, scented, dewy smell of growing things. Languorous lilac and truculent tulip are making my garden gay. The room is flooded with spring sunshine. The curtains are fluttered by a little voluptuous wind, warmed by a hint of summer yet to come.

But I am cold, and my heart feels numbed. For I am going to die. Already I swing in the scale between life and death, and the weights are against me. Twenty-one years ago I longed to die, but now I cling to life because I

do so urgently want a glimpse of what it may hold for you before I go. I have had so much to do with the building of the ship. It is cruel to think I may have to set out on my eternal voyage before I have seen you launched on yours.

It resolves itself into this. After being worried so persistently by you and Cookie and Captain —— to let myself be "thoroughly overhauled" by a competent man, I at last made up my mind to satisfy you all. And so I went to town to consult a specialist. His verdict means that as I cannot afford to be expensively ill I must resign myself to not getting well.

I've been growing used to the idea, living with it, for over a week, and I am tolerably resigned to it, except when the sunshine floods the room as it does now, and the birds are singing with such frantic joyousness. After all, such

feelings are natural—conquered nature making her last stand against disease. When the end comes, no doubt I shall be glad to go. Physical pain is so wearing. But my very life has been forged upon the anvils of pain. A little more or less, what does it matter?

The interview with the specialist was an ordeal I should not care to go through again. It is no good hiding things from one's medical man or one's lawyer.

Before this man I had to show myself as I am, stripped of the soft clinging clothes which make of me in your eyes "a little girl-mother." I have not the contours of girlhood, darling. I am pitifully gaunt beneath the folds.

The first thing my blunt physician told me—as is so often the case, his bluntness hid a kind heart—was that I neglected to nourish myself properly. Then he reeled off a list of expensive things in the way of diet, and ended by

prescribing a sea-voyage, which he said I ought to have taken long ago. He worked himself into quite a fury over my "self-neglect." It did not take me very long to see that he was trying to harden his heart before dealing the fatal blow.

"I've always eaten when I've been hungry," I told him.

He accused me of doing nothing to tempt a flagging appetite and of deferring to seek medical advice. Suddenly he fired out:

"Good heavens, my dear woman, do you think I don't know how you've been racked with pain? Why didn't you come to me before?"

"What is the matter with me now?" I asked.

He told me.

It was only one word. Women of my age dread it.

I kept a grip on myself and heard him

out. Briefly it was this: I must either undergo a costly operation and be a semi-invalid for the rest of my life or dispense with the operation and let things take their irretrievable course.

I said I would think it over. I went home.

But directly I had figured out the expense I knew I should have to forego the operation. I could not and would not go to a free hospital, nor would I accept financial help from our best friend, because he is a man, and because I have old-fashioned prejudices about a woman taking money from a man.

I have enough saved. But to draw upon it for myself would curtail the allowance I make you at college. It would mean that you would have to go down without taking your degree. If I let you do that all my sacrifices would have been made in vain.

Therefore I dare not tell you the truth,

and I have posted you a letter assuring you that the doctor's verdict was quite favourable: a white lie for which I shall surely be forgiven. Here I can write what I like. You will not see the unposted letters my loneliness has prompted me to write to you, until after my release. Then I shall not mind. They will perhaps show how I loved you. Better still if they make you comprehend clearly how carefully I have planned everything for your future and the hopes I have cherished. Perhaps that will help you to fulfil them.

At best, if I take care, I have three or four more years to live. Meanwhile I can only pray for strength and fortitude to keep the truth from you. I am afraid my dying will not be easy.

Now I think of it, what a little of your life I have had, my son. More than half of it—thirteen years—has had to be spent away from me, and the next

few! Oh, I shall be so greedy of the vacations!

I have made my will. I have left instructions that my ashes be mingled with those of my beloved husband and then scattered to the winds. All of us that is earthly borne on God's air—imponderable specks of dust to fall, perhaps on some fragrant flower; to become again part of the panorama of inanimate nature. There is compensation in the thought. It helps to rob death of its sting.

Interment as we usually practise it is a noxious thing. I wish our bodies could vanish together with the last breath they draw, and so save others the sad task of disposing of them. But I suppose that would make it too easy for murderers!

I have always shrunk from the idea of being placed six feet below the earth in a common burying-ground with strangers

whom I never knew in life. Why should I therefore lie with them in death? My living body recoils from the thought of being placed in a wooden husk to decay with me. I could only become reconciled to burial were it possible to lie asleep with only the sod over my face, my mound solitary, encircled by a garden of sweet flowers and perfumes, wherein my spirit might sometimes walk.

Contemplation of the paraphernalia of death—the hearse, the carriages, the sombre trappings of outward woe—jar upon my sensibilities.

I am foolish and womanish to dwell on this aspect of a thing that will have ceased to concern me as soon as it has taken place. I ought to be entranced with the possibilities of all that eternity may hold, of the wider knowledge I shall soon possess.

Death cannot be the end of things. I

am convinced of that. But I do not crave a wider, deeper knowledge of what comes after it. I should be so content with a little special, private heaven. I can conceive nothing more joyous than this: To live forever with your father in the house of our dreams—it need not be made with hands to be a real one. To wait for you, to meet you at our Garden Gate when your life was done, to hear its happenings. And then through eternity to be together, you in your heaven, we in ours, with a conveniently communicating staircase between.

I have just been into my bit of a garden, coaxed out by the rapt beginning of spring. It is only a little villa plot, but all the same brave with colour. The one apple-tree in it—relic of a departed orchard—is a mass of blossom. Other trees are like brides tremulous in white veils. How I would love to wander in

the grounds of our old house, let for so many years now to strangers. Kind old house yielding us an income! You will go back to it, darling. Please God you will one day take your wife to it, as your father took me. Your children will be born in it. Little hands will play with the old toys lying in the nursery cupboard; little feet will scamper down the moss-grown paths. I shall not be there to hear them. . . .

Cookie—back again for good and all—came in a moment ago, slippers and a shawl in her hand.

"There now, ma'am, I knew your shoes would be soaked through and through," she chided, flopped down on her knees, and changed them. "The grass is always soaking in the mornings. You'll catch your death."

She was on her feet again as she spoke that last sentence, with her eyes on

mine. She read something in them. I suppose I could not keep it out.

"Cookie—" I began, and could not go on.

With a cry she took me to her dear bunchy print bosom, put her strong, capable arms round me, as if she would hold me back from my fate by the sheer force of her homely love.

"I've seen it coming!" she choked. "Oh, my little mistress!"

There are moments when sympathy, be it that of faithful servant or nearer friend, is what the comfort of the angels must have been to Christ in His Agony.

I am the better for the tears we shed together.

Dear old Cookie will have red eyes for the rest of the day, and the tradespeople will think I have been scolding her!

Why do living people shrink from looking upon the dead? Death is out-

wardly beautiful; it is only decay that is ghastly. There is a peace and majesty beyond words upon the faces of the dead.

When I am dead, dearest, if the love you bore me living is not strong enough to bring you to take a last look at me dead, for pity's sake do not force yourself to do so out of a sense of duty. It would pain me to think that your gaze would be reluctant, or that you would not be able to kiss me without a shudder. My lips have been pressed with rapture by your father, and I would have his son kiss them with lingering love at the last, or not at all.

On a First Effort in Literature

(Posted)

MY dearest Boy:

The —— *Review* with your article in it was on my breakfast table this morning. When I turned to the contents page your name leapt out at me, although it was in exactly the same type as the rest.

It is your first serious contribution to a recognized journal for thinking people, and as such I cannot fail to be proud of you and it—this, your first flight into literature proper. Of course it has great merit, otherwise it would not have been accepted for such a good publication. "The Educational Significance of Imperialism"—you have tackled a big subject, and, if I am competent to judge, you have done excellently.

What pleases me most, however, is the style in which it is written. Style is a wonderful gift. You have it, just as your father had it. Is it hereditary I wonder?—that rare ability for saying exactly what you mean in the choicest words. Of one thing I am sure: you would not at your age have shown yourself possessed of it without a knowledge of the classics. Even your limited reading of the Greek and Roman writers shows in the article. So now you have a tangible illustration of the advantage of a university education. It has always seemed to me that the best form of literary expression comes from the universities. A great many self-educated men are credited by uncritical people with the gift of style, but it is not really that: it is native eloquence—quite a different thing. It may carry one away but it is not always art.

Yes, I *am* proud of you, proud of

being your mother. I get the reflected glory, you see! My saying that won't give you "swelled head," I know. If you're in danger of a touch of that ailment turn to ——'s article on ——, and ——'s on ——, and you'll get cured. I'm not trying to belittle your work, only pointing out how fine theirs is, and *how long they have been in making their literary reputations.*

What I like, too, about your paper (isn't that the proper technical way of speaking of it?) is its suggestiveness. You touch on so many interesting subjects, showing that you could write of them with authority. I admire versatility—in a man. Women never seem to have it. A curious thing about women, moreover, is that even when they stick to one subject they are seldom thorough at it, never so thorough as a man. A woman hasn't the same close attentiveness of mind as a man. She

invariably fails to keep to the channel of thought. Don't I, a woman, illustrate that? I'm rambling now. Yes, we are impractical creatures, and we need man to keep us in order.

That is why I am quite indifferent about Woman's Suffrage. We may have as much right to a vote as the unintelligent labourer, but that would be a poor reason for giving us one. Two wrongs do not make a right. Universal suffrage is an absurdity. People don't give their domestic servants the right to dictate how the household shall be run. The average servant is not capable of management. Why then should the much bigger affairs of a country be mainly in the hands of its least intelligent class? The Suffragette's reply, I suppose, would be that her intelligence is infinitely higher than that of a labourer. I daresay it is; but imagine a woman playing at statesmanship! How long

would she keep her head if the country were scared by the cry of "War!"—or "A Mouse!" No, what women need are husbands, not votes!

I am going off the track again! I must be getting old!

By the way, dear, you said something about spending half of the vac. with S——. Of course I shall be disappointed not to have you with me, but you must do as you like.

Mothers are always so greedy. Still, there are reasons why I want you extra badly. You will know them one day. Can't S—— come to us instead?

I know it's only a villa, but Cookie's so first-class you can forget that. Captain —— says you two can have his car all the time. Do come, darling!

Your devoted

MOTHER.

On Success

(*Posted*)

MY darling Boy:

Your telegram which arrived too late for delivery last night, came with the letters this morning. I was in my bath when the charwoman who comes in the morning pushed my correspondence under the door. At sight of the pink form, like Venus rising from the sea, I leapt out and seized it, not even stopping to dry my hands. I knew what it was about. Have I thought of anything else for the last fortnight? Success or failure? And then I saw in the joyful words, so full of meaning to you and me and nothing whatever to the telegraphist (she otherwise surely couldn't have helped adding a "hurrah" of her own):

"*First class.*"

Oh, I was proud! Oh, I was thankful! I knelt on the floor, all dripping, and prayed for sheer joy: Honours! And first class at that! I dressed in a flutter and sent you my answering wire as soon as I got downstairs. After that I invited Captain —— to dinner to tell him the great news. I had promised him I would. We had the bottle of champagne which I have been treasuring up for this very occasion.

We drank your health. We clinked glasses across the table—we two silly old people—and sang in voices tuneless with emotion, "For he's a jolly good fellow."

Late into the night we sat and talked about your Career. Yesterday was such an event in your life. I had to discuss it with a man. I needed a man's help. Happily I have it. This man has been a faithful friend to us, dear; one of the best, one of the few.

He was as keen about your future as your own dear father would have been. At first I was too excited to talk sensibly. My hopes and my ambitions for you ran away with me. I mapped out your prospects in extravagant terms. There was nothing you were not to attain to. I was very silly, and deserved the pulling up I got.

Captain —— brought me down from the clouds. (I wish I had a man's control; and yet at this moment I wouldn't change my exuberant mother's feelings for all the masculine wisdom and logic in the world!) I had to curb my impatience and listen to his sane views. Soon you would be down from Cambridge, your education completed but your future undetermined. Your prospects were like a constellation in the nebulous state. They might be dissipated in space, or converted into a star of magnitude. (I sat restlessly

drumming my fingers on the table while he spoke.) They must not be left to chance. Had I determined on any particular career for you? None definitely. To think of you as the Lord Chancellor or the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Poet Laureate at a jump was a fairy tale. One had to begin at the other, the small, end.

What should it be? Business? No. The Services, the Bar, the Church, the medical profession? I didn't know. I couldn't make up my mind. I wanted you to be a gallant soldier or sailor, a leading Counsel, a great divine, a famous doctor, a scientific genius, and a great painter all at once. I wasn't sure that I should be satisfied even then. There was Music, Literature, Exploration, Engineering, Parliament——

He stopped me there. How did a parliamentary training appeal to me? I wondered how long it would be before

you could be Prime Minister. Before I had time to answer he said he might be able to get you a private secretaryship to a friend of his, a M.P. A salary of £150 a year would go with it, and you could make something at literature in addition. Your duties as secretary would not be unduly heavy; the position was a decent one; you would meet the right sort of people; you would have considerable spare time.

It sounded delightful to me. Does it to you? You would have chambers in the Temple, and make "Fleet Street" your bedfellow! Of course this private secretaryship is in the air at present, and we mustn't count on it, though I know my dear friend well enough to be satisfied that he would not have proposed it unless he had something to go on. Think what it might lead to: an under-secretaryship to a Minister; a constituency of your own; perhaps a

post under Government! I firmly believe the Premiership is not so far off after all!

Your delighted

MOTHER.

On London and its Dangers

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

When I said good-bye to you this afternoon I tried so hard to be matter-of-fact and not look weepy, but I was *bursting* to tell you to be careful of the motor-buses. Ever since it has been definitely settled you are to live in town I have done nothing but read about "Street Dangers." What I see in the papers makes my eyes dilate and my heart palpitate. Most women—and in this category you must count me—are as constitutionally timid of traffic as they are of cows. And yet I know it is no good telling you to be careful. You'll exercise as much care as the average young man with an agile pair of

legs, and no more. Beyond that, as in all other things, you will take your risk. I feel so impotent. I want to safeguard you from every danger under the sun.

I'm sure the zenana custom originated in a man's desire to protect his womenkind, and not from the purely selfish standpoint of hiding his womenkind from other male eyes. We women would dearly like to protect our sons and husbands in some similar manner, not because we do not feel we can trust them, but for the simple reason that the world in general cannot possibly regard them as the wonderful beings we do.

I know it is absurd of me to be so apprehensive. My "fear of ill exceeds the ill I fear." I'll try and forget it.

I am delighted that you are going to start life under such promising conditions. It is good that you should live in London and gain your first serious

experience of life in the most cosmopolitan city of the world.

One of two things is sure to make its impression upon you: the grim seriousness of London or its frivolity. You will not see both at the same time. The grimness of it was always borne in upon me most forcibly while driving through the City, where men swarm and women are the exception. Away from those portions where leisured people live it is for the most part a City of set faces, thoughtful, remorseless, tragic, determined, terribly preoccupied; faces of men who are being swamped, who are swamping each other; of men who will succeed, of men who will fail; and all of them men who are grubbing for gold. Nothing there but what is sordid. But there is a touching side to this tragedy of struggle. If one had eyes to see, one would perceive, rising before the mental vision of these grim

toilers, faces and forms of soft and tender outline, the appealing faces of women and little children who look to them for bread—faces and forms significant of all that is sublime in the lives of the toilers, yet inciting them to redoubled efforts in the bloodless fight for existence.

That is London at work.

The artificial aspect of London as it will first burst upon you is a riot of shouting colour—posters, women, theatres, restaurants, shop-windows, sky-signs—a kaleidoscopic blaze. It is good for the soul if not for the eyes to see the other drab side of it sometimes—the gaunt, unilluminated side. Walk on the Embankment; see the derelicts upon its benches; soak in the heartbreak of the unhappy scene, and wait for dawn. See the wrecks arise and wearily disappear into that limbo where the submerged ones of a large city pass their waking hours. Night over, mark the

sober, steady hundreds going to their daily work. It is not all light laughter, it is not all heartbreak. There's a sane and happy mean.

London affects one like a strong human book by a ruthless author. Parts of it are so pitiful that you yearn over them: parts so ugly that you hesitate to read on: some of it so beautiful that you can forget and forgive the rest. It is life spread thick.

There is another side of London life —its nocturnal side. Unhappily it has a fierce attraction for young men. I want you to avoid it. London by night is a market for gross charms. It dazzles with its electric brilliance and blinds the inexperienced to its tinsel. It gives a false glamour to frailty, makes of its idols false goddesses. Beware of these painted toys. They are not even new. Others before you have played with them in the gutters of the world. But

a fresh coat of paint and a new dress of tinsel mislead unwary youth.

Nocturnal city life may almost be called the drug-habit of youth. It saps the body and enervates the mind. Eschew it; it is bad form. If you must be intemperate, wait until your head is stronger, and then confine yourself to the wine of pure vintage.

In plain words, dear, be very careful of the women you meet, because of the woman you will some day love. One must be worthy to serve at Love's altar. One shudders at the idea of a votary who approaches it with unclean hands.

Am I lecturing? I suppose so. I don't want to. I only want to put you on your guard against the avoidable —the pit-falls that old eyes see but which escape young ones. If you must gamble do it within your means and with men of your own class. Now that you are up for a good club there

will be no difficulty about that. You are fairly sure to take to billiards and bridge. I have no prejudices against either, so long as you play them in moderation. With betting on horses it's different. Such knowledge as I have of the turf I got from your father. He had friends who owned race-horses. He knew the turf. He used to say of it that for every genuine sportsman on it there were ten thousand blackguards —the scum of the earth. I quote from an article he once wrote. It tells you what I cannot out of my own experience.

"Racing may once have been the sport of kings. Nowadays, it seems to be the main occupation of rogues and fools. The rogues are the professional element, the people who make a living at it by doubtful means. The fools are those who back other people's horses. Generally they do it at random; often

in the mistaken belief that they are well-informed. . . .

"Think how few people you meet who know anything about horses. Even the exceptions, the men and women who hunt, are ignorant of what goes on in a racing stable. They know nothing of training operations or jockeyship. They think of a thoroughbred as a sort of equine greyhound with a satiny skin. The qualities that make him a fast galloper are hidden from them. They back this horse or that without ever having seen it, without knowing whether it is fit to run or meant to win. . . .

"The so-called racing experts of the press give their readers a daily 'tip.' The day after they have to devote half a column to explain away the mistake they made! As for professional tipsters, they wisely prefer to take a shilling or two for their 'special information' rather than back the horse it concerns.

"And what of the owners? For one gentleman among them there are half-a-dozen German Jews—the kind of 'sportsmen' who if they were to start off outside a horse would have to come home inside a cab. What can these financiers know of racing beyond its statistics? All they can do is to pay their trainers and jockeys extravagantly to secure them the big advertisement of frequent wins.

"Bookmakers and professional backers own horses. So do other people in assumed names. There are well-known racing men, posing as supporters of 'the honour of the turf,' who owe their success upon it to every form of knavery, from blackmail and card-sharping to 'pulling' the horses they run. You have only to watch the law reports to know which they are. The worst are always the plaintiffs!"

That ought to be enough, dearest,

to dispel any hope you may have cherished of winning money by backing horses. I shouldn't have made such a fuss of the question had you not shown such keenness about last year's Derby. Racing proper is the pursuit of country gentlemen of leisure and means, not of a young man who has his way to make in the world. I would dearly love you to hunt. Perhaps that will come, one day.

I started by trying to tell you about the pitfalls of London life. You see I have got into the country again. That is where, if I had only myself to please, I would rather have you. But I am fully conscious, all the same, that every young man who is to succeed must go to the capital of his country and woo her with his youth.

So blessings on you, darling, and all, every bit of my love wherever you may be.

Your

MOTHER.

On a Dark Hour

(Unposted)

THERE are moments, like today, when I feel bowed to the earth. Nothing that requires time seems worth doing, for I may never be able to finish it. I am losing all interest in life, sinking into a torpor. Is it part of my disease?

In the morning, when I wake to a fresh day of pain, I ask myself what is the use of dressing and going through the fixed monotonous routine of another day? I shall soon be beyond dressing, beyond hiding my malady. Why not lie still and watch the paper roses blooming on my wall?

In a mood like this, the most interesting book cannot tempt me to look inside

its covers. Before long, all forms of reading will be beyond me; no thoughts seem worth thinking or writing. Imagination sickens or becomes unhealthy, having nothing to feed on but itself.

Am I the mother of a son? Or did I dream it? And where is he? And why am I here alone?

On the Desire for Distraction

(Posted)

DEAREST ——:

I am not feeling very well. Consequently, I have a fit of the dumps. The weather is not conducive to bright spirits. There is a grey sky, but it is not so grey that there is not a hint of blue in it. There is no sun, but it wants to come out. It is not raining, but it may rain at any moment.

Look out your socks, my dear boy, and send me a pile to darn. I hope there are great big holes in them, so that I may sew my heart into them for you to stand upon.

Your

MOTHER.

On an Appointment to a Responsible Post

(*Posted*)

MY dearest ——:

It is most splendid news! Private secretary to a prominent M.P.! I *knew* Captain —— was confident of getting you the appointment, in spite of his caution against harbouring false hopes. The future now rests with yourself. Do all that is expected of you. Do more. It will come back to you a hundred-fold.

There is a splendid future before you. Remember that a politician's success is often largely due to his secretary's efforts, just as a general's depends on the brains of his chief of staff. You will have a mass of facts to collect, prepare, and arrange. You will be the

Great Man's prompter. Your eyes must always be on the book. Be accurate and *he* won't make mistakes.

It is quite plain to me that your duties will be a fine education for public life. All the information you will gather for your employer will later on be of incalculable value to yourself, especially if you ultimately take up politics. It will be "ghost" work to begin with; you won't shine in the public eye; but don't let that discourage you. In political circles a good secretary gets his dues. Ministers and party managers are always on the look-out for him. Good places are found for good secretaries, constituencies often.

And that reminds me. You will hear much that is hidden from the public, matters that concern public men and the exalted ones of the earth. Be discreet. Keep these things to yourself. You will also meet a lot of important

people and some powerful ones. Be pleasant wherever you can; show respect wherever it is due. But don't try and swim with the "big pitchers"; don't show that you want them. A wise aloofness is the better plan, then they may want you.

I am full of wise saws and golden maxims, this morning, only I can't express them properly. I am too exalted about your prospects. I see your future all rosy. I shall dream of Fame for you tonight.

Now to earth with a sudden drop.

Why haven't you been down for a single day during the last month? The first week I thought you were ill; the second, pride kept me from asking; the third, I said to myself, "Wait." This is the fourth.

Why are you stopping in town when you know how I live and long for the all too short Saturday and Sunday with

you, darling? You don't *tell* me any thing. I can only conjecture. It would not fill me with such apprehension did I not remember that hitherto we have both looked forward so much to these short, snatched times together. No mother and son could be more devoted to each other than we are. We have always been such friends. I have never sought a confidence. You have never withheld one.

Sitting at home alone is weary work, Son. There is nothing to fill my life except you.

I have a proposition to make. I half hoped it would come from you, but as it has not I won't be backward in making it myself.

We cannot go back to the old house. It is too far from London. But there is no reason why we should not have a little flat of our own there, and live together. It would be heaven for me and a home

for you. It may only be for a little while, but I should so love it, darling.

You would not find me in the way. I should have a small sitting-room, or failing that my bedroom, so that when you wanted to entertain your bachelor friends, I should not be in the way. We could have Cookie (bless her faithful heart), as *bonne à toute faire*, and between us we'd evolve menus of such excellence that you would be able to give a little dinner sometimes instead of taking your guests to a restaurant. Such a poor form of hospitality that. Personally I would rather eat a modest meal in the comfort of a friend's house than the very best dinner among a crowd of strangers. You may dine at a restaurant with the same party for a week, but you would know them no more intimately at the end of it than at the beginning. The restaurant dinner is overestimated because it is fashion-

able. And to pay for what your guests have consumed under their very eyes! Barbaric!

Sometimes, darling, we would have a pretty girl or two at our little parties—girls like flowers, with roses and lilies in their cheeks, pansy and forget-me-not in their eyes. It would remind us of the country.

Will you be glad to introduce your mother to your friends sometimes? She will be very proud if you do.

But some of our evenings we must keep to ourselves. You reading and smoking, I, with needle-work, content to sit and dream.

Dear, I had to break off rather suddenly. It is several hours since I began this. You mustn't take me seriously about the flat. I couldn't live in London. All the more reason why I want you here. Be sure and come this week-

end, my dearest. You need not write again. I shall expect you by the 6.45 on Friday night.

I will ask no questions. There is probably some very good reason why you haven't been down for a whole month, which you will tell me of your own accord.

Good-night, sweetheart.

Your loving

MOTHER.

P. S.—I doubt whether you will be able to read these last few lines. I have had rather a bad attack, and it has left me shaky.

On the Rending of the Veil

(*Unposted*)

I KNOW now what has kept you away from me, though no word has passed between us. I knew, the moment I saw you, before I kissed you. That is why I kissed you on the forehead instead of the lips. I knew she was not a good woman. You would have told me everything had it been worthy of being told. You were ashamed.

My son, you have bartered your manhood cheaply. It is a dreadful thing to trifle with Love, God's best gift, to treat it as if it were a vile thing in motley.

"Unspotted from the world." Oh, God! *Not* unspotted now!

I could cry my heart out. My

womanhood, my motherhood, the dead ghost of my maidenhood, the sex within me, are in travail.

I know that you have rent the frail veil that makes woman a mystery to the boy. There is knowledge in your eyes. You cannot meet mine.

Women weep at the nuptials of their daughters and are not ashamed of their tears.

But the mothers of sons must weep in secret while a gay woman laughs.

On a Photograph

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

You left a photograph behind you. It must have been in a pocket and dropped out, for I found it on the floor. I return it in case you want it. I judge the original to be an actress, since she has autographed all of it except the face. Isn't it rather cheap to let a woman, quite a new friend, I gather, label it, "To my dear Boy"? *I* called you that!

Still, perhaps she's a very amusing person.

Are you coming down next week, dear?

Much love.

Your devoted

MOTHER.

On an Engagement

(*Posted*)

DEAREST ——:

You cannot think how delighted I am to get your letter. Although you are rather young to think of marriage, still if you're in love, and if she's a dear sweet girl, which I do not doubt, it is only natural that you should want to pledge yourself to her. For myself, I am glad. I shall have a daughter as well as a son, and my arms are wide open to receive her. I was half afraid (Heaven knows why, for I might have known you had better taste) that you had become infatuated with an actress. So you can imagine how relieved I feel. Bring her down next week, if her people will let her come. In the meantime

tell me all and everything. Her name? Her age? Eighteen or nineteen, I suppose. I was eighteen when I first loved your father, so I know how really and truly a girl of that age can love. It's the sweetest, best, and freshest age to love—the bud and flower of life. Is she tall—dark or fair? Who are her people? (A typical mother's question! As if you care a fig about her people!) Do you think she will like me? Tell her I want to *love* her!

All my love, dear darling.

Your excited, delighted

MOTHER.

On a Disappointment

(*Posted*)

MY very dear son:

I am so bewildered, dazed, and shocked that I have been sitting and staring at this blank sheet of paper for hours. Gradually, out of the chaos, my thoughts began to sort themselves, and have brought me to a conclusion that makes my son a stranger to me. Even now I keep on deluding myself that what you tell me cannot be true.

When you came down last week, there was a barrier between us—of shame on your part, grief for your shame on mine. It explained why you had avoided me of late. When I returned the photograph I knew the type of woman it represented and that she had detained

you. Then, when you wrote saying you were engaged, I felt I must have been mistaken. Otherwise you could not, as I believed, have offered yourself to a sweet girl. And now I have your letter in which you tell me she is not exactly a young girl but the woman whose photograph I have already seen.

I did not want to write or do anything I might afterwards regret. I did not want to lose you just when it is vital for your welfare that I should keep you. I sent for Captain ——. I gave him your letter to read. I said not one word of my private feelings, only this:

"You are a man of the world. Advise me. Do you know anything of this woman? Ought my son to marry her?"

When he gave me back your letter he briefly answered that he would go up to town at once and see you. He would tell me nothing save that he knew of her, that all men knew of her. He called

you a fool. He called you disloyal to me.

I had only one more question to ask, because of an unspeakable fear.

"Suppose there is a reason why he should feel it to be his duty to marry her?"

"There could be no reason why any man should owe such a woman a duty of any sort," he answered. "Don't you understand what she is?"

I bowed my head in shame.

He promised to return and tell me what you had said. He has just done so. It appears that you know everything about her that there is to know, and that you will not listen to anyone's advice.

What can I say to you, I, your mother, who have built up the house of your life with prayer and fasting? Aye, even with fasting! Is this woman to defile it? You too, who are the seed of the most hallowed wedded love.

Now you need your father. The man you have called a friend, who has been instrumental in starting you on your career, you regard as an old meddler. You told him so. You deem me prejudiced. And yet I, your mother, who have been shielded from all that is unlovely in life, know that you are in the grip of the mental malady which is responsible for all the sin, shame, sorrow, even the origin of crime, with which the world is groaning—passion apart from love.

One day, as surely as you will remember these words of mine with gratitude or regret, you will meet and love a good woman. This is absolutely inevitable. Every man loves one good woman in his life. Then, if you worship at this unholy shrine, what will you be able to offer at the altar of real love when it comes to you? Your hands will be empty. Either a separation that is

worse than the bitterness of death, since honour and not death dictates it; or, out of the wealth of her love, the surrender to a call that will fill her with regret, possibly with shame.

It is grievous to think that these women, *these others*, steal the youth and the best of a man, and that the sweet woman who keeps her life as a tended garden should have to water it with her tears because of follies committed by another. It is always the sinless woman who pays, over and over again.

If this woman cared for you at all in any worthy sense she would know it to be her duty to send you away from her.

My darling child, I could not find it in my heart to oppose your wishes were it not for a mother's awful prescience which satisfies her that the step you contemplate taking will be disastrous. You are dazed by the flashlight of a sordid romance; but why, oh

why, do you seek to sanctify a gross thing by the sacrament of marriage, an institution that must have its roots in a reverence for love if it is to last?

For love of me, dearest, put an end to this before it is too late. I pray to you, darling, to be guided by my love that has never failed you. Can you refuse me when I beseech you to do this one thing for me? Is not your filial love great enough to make the sacrifice?

Darling, could I pray on my knees night and morning for your happiness if I had a thought of self in my heart? I have never thought of myself since I had you. How can I strengthen the appeal in written words so that you may know it as the supplication of my soul? If you knew that they were actually written in my life's blood would you turn to me now?

Your

MOTHER.

On an Interview

(*Unposted*)

AS you would not listen to my importunities, I gave heed to yours. I went as you desired to see her, yesterday, having promised that if I could be sure she loved you I would withdraw my opposition. I felt safe, because, whatever her artifices, she could not hide her real feelings from me. I was even generous enough not to take her unawares, as I might have done. I made an appointment. She should have time to collect her weapons, to appear to the best advantage, if she wished to do so.

And because, sick woman as I am, I am still very woman, I dressed with care. I wore black, my simplest frock,

and my black hat with its soft frill of lace and subduing band of velvet. I am glad I did not look old and frumpish. I was glad my hair was still bright, and that honourable men had found me good to look upon. She should not regard me as a specimen of the censorious mother that her type scorns.

I called at her house. I saw her—a pretty woman, outwardly artificial, with the sly gift of charm. She was so pretty that my first feeling was one of genuine sorrow that she had misused her life. She need not have stooped to that. Men would have stooped to her. She had been burning a joss-stick in the room. That and the fatigue of the journey made me feel faint.

We shook hands. She sat figuratively speaking with couched lance. I could not mistake her attitude.

A woman's way with another woman is either to skim the surface or go

straight to the heart of things. I went straight to the heart of things. I had neither the time nor the inclination to avoid the direct issue.

"Do you love my son?" I asked.

On her reply hung worlds.

If she loved you I must have known it then. If her emotions had been too strong for words I should have seen it in the glowing devotion in her eyes, and the rose-patch of a sudden blush. She could not have hidden them. She looked at me, quite calmly and steadily. No woman, be she nineteen or forty-nine, who cared for a man, could have looked at that man's mother as she looked at me. If she had cared, however undemonstrative either or both of us might have been, however divergent in other ways, our hearts must have been responsive at that moment.

She answered with a light polite laugh:

"Love's rather a strong word, don't you think?"

"Tell me quite frankly why you wish to marry him."

"I like him. He's such a dear boy. And it's time I settled down."

"It is early for him to settle down," I said. "He is barely twenty-four."

"I'm thirty," was her candid rejoinder. "Boys fall hopelessly in love with women of my age. —— is awfully devoted. That sort of thing has its charm. It partly makes up for his want of money. Still, he may 'get there.' I'm ambitious."

"I, too, have been ambitious for my son."

I was about to try and give her some idea of how I loved you, of all that you meant to me, when I saw a preoccupied look in her face. She was not listening. My feelings did not interest her. So I got up to go.

"Well. Have we your blessing?" she asked with a careless smile.

I told her that I did not desire the marriage. She was a little rude, and her last words were in the nature of a taunt.

"I don't think you'll succeed in putting him off me."

It was a little crude; the phrase had more than a touch of vulgarity in it. But I did not retort.

"I'm only sorry that—I should have lived to see this," I rejoined. "It's so sordid."

"Meaning me?"

"Your life—and the hold you are exercising over my son."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Do you think a mother does not know?"

At that she laughed lightly, as if to show that any conclusion of mine did not matter.

"If you think I bolstered him up with the usual silly reason why he ought to marry me, you're mistaken. I'm not very strong on the maternal instincts."

I felt scorched. I endured the same nauseating sensation as one gets when reading an ugly situation in a realistic novel. Because a thing is conscientiously true to life its brutality is no excuse for giving expression to it.

I left her.

It had been my intention to come straight on to you. But I was too worn and spent. It was one of my bad days. On the way back my physical pain became so great that it actually dulled my mental anguish. When I got home I was just able to crawl to my bed while Cookie went for Dr. ——. He comes more often now to give me the morphia I dare not inject at discretion. If I did I should abuse it instead of enduring

the pain—setting my lips and burying my face in the smothering pillow.

The narcotic flowed through my veins, soothed my throbbing agony, whispered to my dulled consciousness:

"What does it matter? Nothing matters. Sleep is delicious. Forget!"

On the Last Gift

(*Posted*)

MY beloved Son:

You know that part of the Bible where Jesus tells His disciples He is going to die? When I was a little girl I used to wonder *why* he told them. I thought it would have been so much grander had He, to save the world, died without announcing His earthly end; that that would have shown greater self-sacrifice. But in time I understood that I was wrong. However desirous Jesus may have been to make His great gift to the world silently, He was debarred from doing so. The world needed telling for its own salvation. Jesus was the embodiment of self-sacrifice, but in the matter of His death He saw

the unwisdom of following the dictates of His great heart.

So, if immeasurably less so, is it with me. My heart prompts me to keep from you what I have to tell. The moment has come for you to know it, perhaps for your own good.

I have prayed to you with tears. I have appealed to you with my whole heart. I have implored you, in your dead father's name, to listen to my wishes. And in vain. Now, as a last resource, I am compelled to let you know of the obligation you are under to me, so that you cannot in honour refuse the only serious request I have ever made you, the sole debt I have ever asked you to discharge.

Dear one, I have made my body a stepping-stone for your advancement in life. I went without necessities that you might have success. True, I made light of what I did because my heart was

light. In winter, when, as you grew, your clothes cost more, and mine wore out, I did with less and defied the cold. I was often hungry. I was so proud of my economies. They had to be endured if you were to have your education. I thought of the man in the making.

Then I was ill and I did without the doctor. I knew mine was not a trifling complaint or I would have endeavoured to remedy it. When at last I was driven to the specialist I had to choose between spending money on myself or you. Had I decided selfishly you would have had to leave college in your first term. The specialist gave me three years if I did not undergo the operation he advised. That leaves me about six months now.

I am dying, darling.

I would give my soul not to have had to tell you this even now. You would not have stayed up for your degree, your

honours, your blue, had I done so. You would have been unselfish, and come down. I spared you that, spare me this.

My last request is that you give me your pledge never to see this woman again. Believe me I feel it a grievous thing to have to urge the self-denial I practiced out of love in order to coerce you.

Oh, my most precious son, come to me! Come and assure me that I have you still; that you will in the fulness of time choose a good woman, because first and foremost, goodness is the chief thing that matters.

And yet my heart will be sore if your promise is only given because a sense of honour demands the liquidation of what you feel to be a debt.

Even as I have loved you, my darling —out of your love! Out of *your* love!

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Nunc Dimittis

LORD, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen: thy salvation,

Which thou hast prepared: before the face of all people;

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end.

AMEN.